GODS AND HEROES

FRANCILLON

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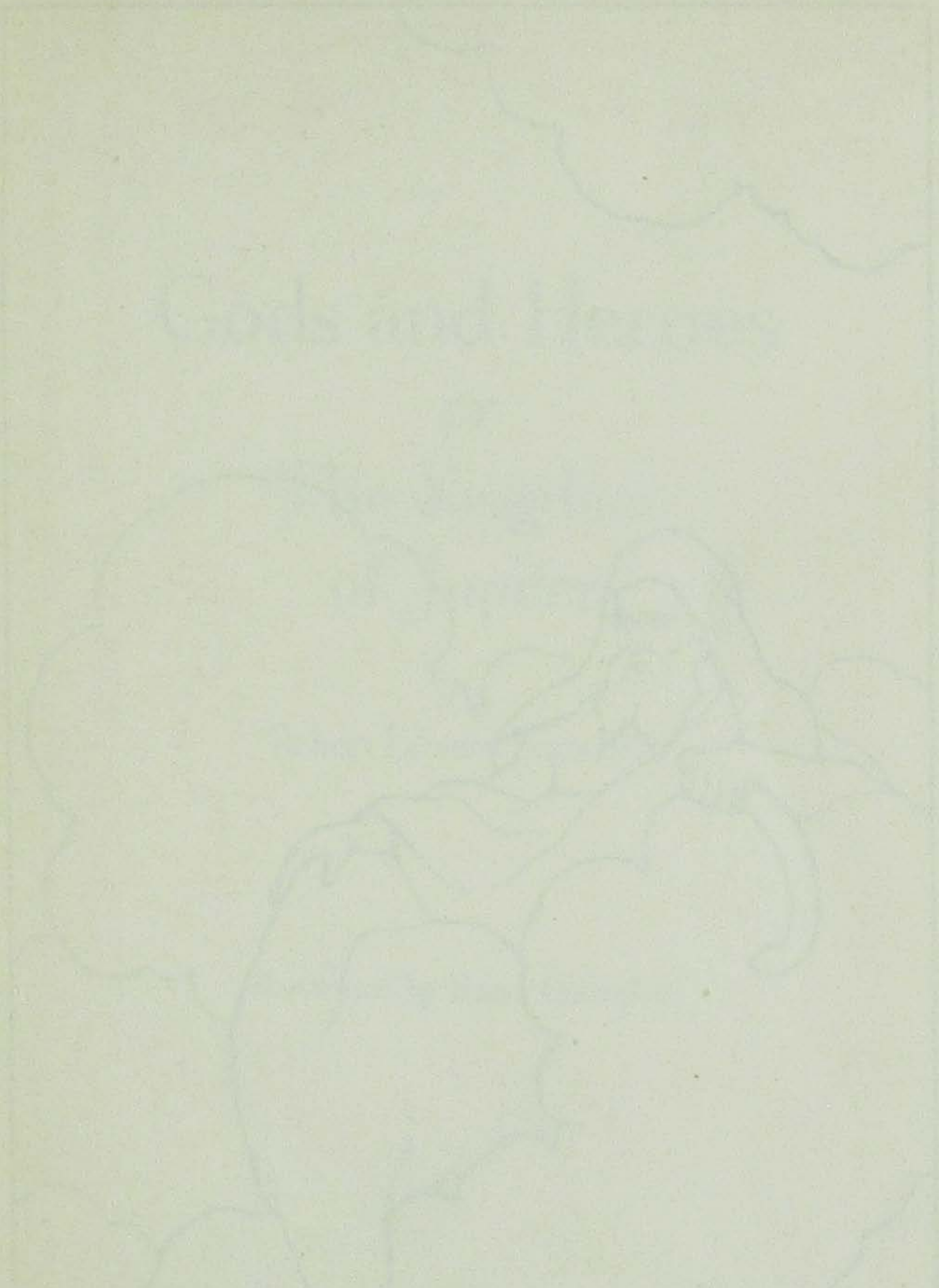

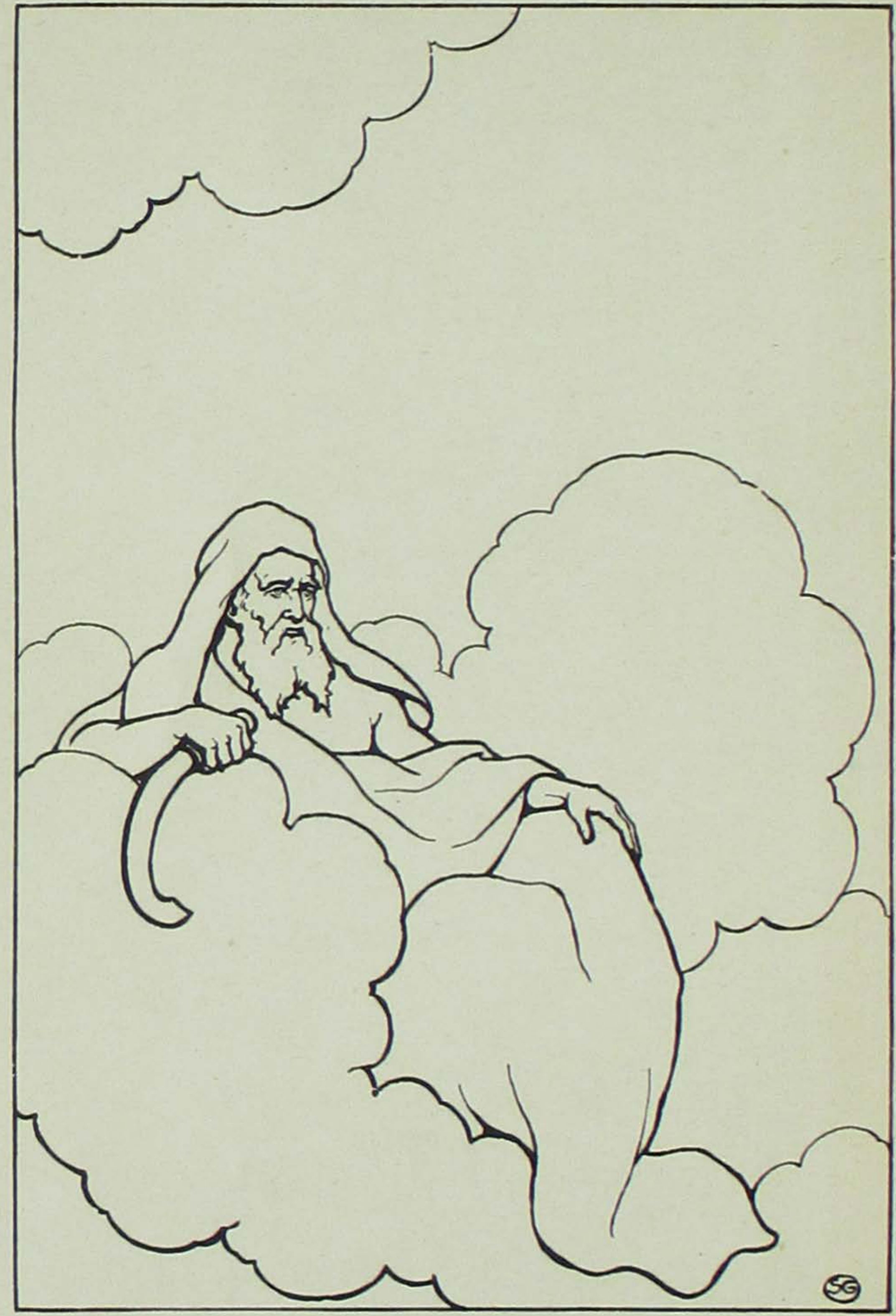

SATURN

Gods and Heroes
or
The Kingdom of Jupiter

By
Robert Edward Francillon

Illustrated by Sears Gallagher

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TO

FRANCIS FELIX

FOR WHOM

THIS BOOK WAS BEGUN

PREFACE

THESE stories will, I trust, explain their own purpose; but a few words touching their form are due to critical readers.

It will be seen that the mythology adopted throughout is strictly of the old-fashioned kind, which goes to Ovid as its leading authority and ignores the difference between the gods of Greece and the gods of Rome. I have deliberately followed this plan because, while there is not the remotest fear (quite the contrary) that young people, when or if they become scholars, will not be duly initiated into the mysteries of scientific and comparative mythology, there is considerable danger that the stories of the gods and heroes which have saturated literature and have become essential portions of the thought and life of ages may become explained away only too thoroughly. It is easy for my readers to acquire the science of the subject hereafter; but where mythology is concerned, the poetry must come before the prose, and it will be a distinct loss for them if, under scientific teaching, they have never been familiar with the ancient stories as they were read by the makers of literature in the precritical times. Without the mythology of the Latin poets modern literature in all languages becomes almost a dead letter; hundreds of allusions become pointles and thousands of substances fade into shadows. Of th three mythologies, the Greek, the Roman, and the poetic, or conventional, I have selected the last, because, among other reasons, it is as useful, and as needful to be known, as the others, on general grounds; it is more useful, and more needful, than the others, as a portion of literature and as an intellectual influence; it is preferable as a means of exciting an interest in the subject; it is not in the remotest degree an obstacle to more accurate knowledge, for which indeed it is an almost indispensable preparation.

After these observations, there is no occasion to explain why I have made a point of employing Latin names and Latin spelling. The corresponding Greek names are given with the Latin names in the pronouncing vocabulary at the end of the book.

Another point to which I should call attention is the attempt to cover (within limits) the whole ground, so that the reader may not be left in ignorance of any considerable tract of the realm of Jove. The stories are not detached; they are brought, so far as I have been able to bring them, into a single saga, free from inconsistencies and contradictions. Omissions owing to the necessarily prescribed limits will, I think, always find a place to fall into. Altogether, the lines of the volume diverge so entirely from those of Kingsley, or Hawthorne, or any other story-teller known to me, that I may feel myself safe from the danger of fatal comparisons. Of course this aim at a certain completeness has implied the difficult task of selection among variants of the same story or incident. Sometimes I have preferred the most interesting, sometimes the version most consistent with the general plan. But I have endeavored, as a rule, to adopt the most usual or familiar, as being most in accordance with my original intention.

I need not, however, enumerate difficulties, which, if they are overcome, need no apology; and, if they are not, deserve none. The greatest and most obvious, the strict observance of the *maxima reverentia*, will, and must always remain, crucial. In this, at least, I trust I have succeeded, in whatever else I may have failed. These stories were begun for one who was very dear to me, and who was their first and best critic; and I shall be glad if what was begun, in hope, for him should be of use to others.

R. E. FRANCILLON

CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. Saturn and the Golden Age 3

II. The Gods and the Giants 8

III. The First Man; or, Prometheus and Pandora 14

IV. The Great Flood; or, Deucalion and Pyrrha 23

V. Latona and Niobe 30

VI. The Flayed Piper; or, Apollo and Marsyas 35

VII. Midas the Avaricious 41

VIII. Midas the Critic 49

IX. Apollo and the Laurel 54

X. Apollo and the Hyacinth 58

XI. Apollo and the Heliotrope 61

XII. The Narcissus 65

XIII. Presumption; or, Apollo and Phaëthon . . 71

XIV. Diana and Orion 77

XV. Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom 86

XVI. Vulcan, the God of Fire 91

XVII. Love and the Soul; or, Cupid and Psyche . 101

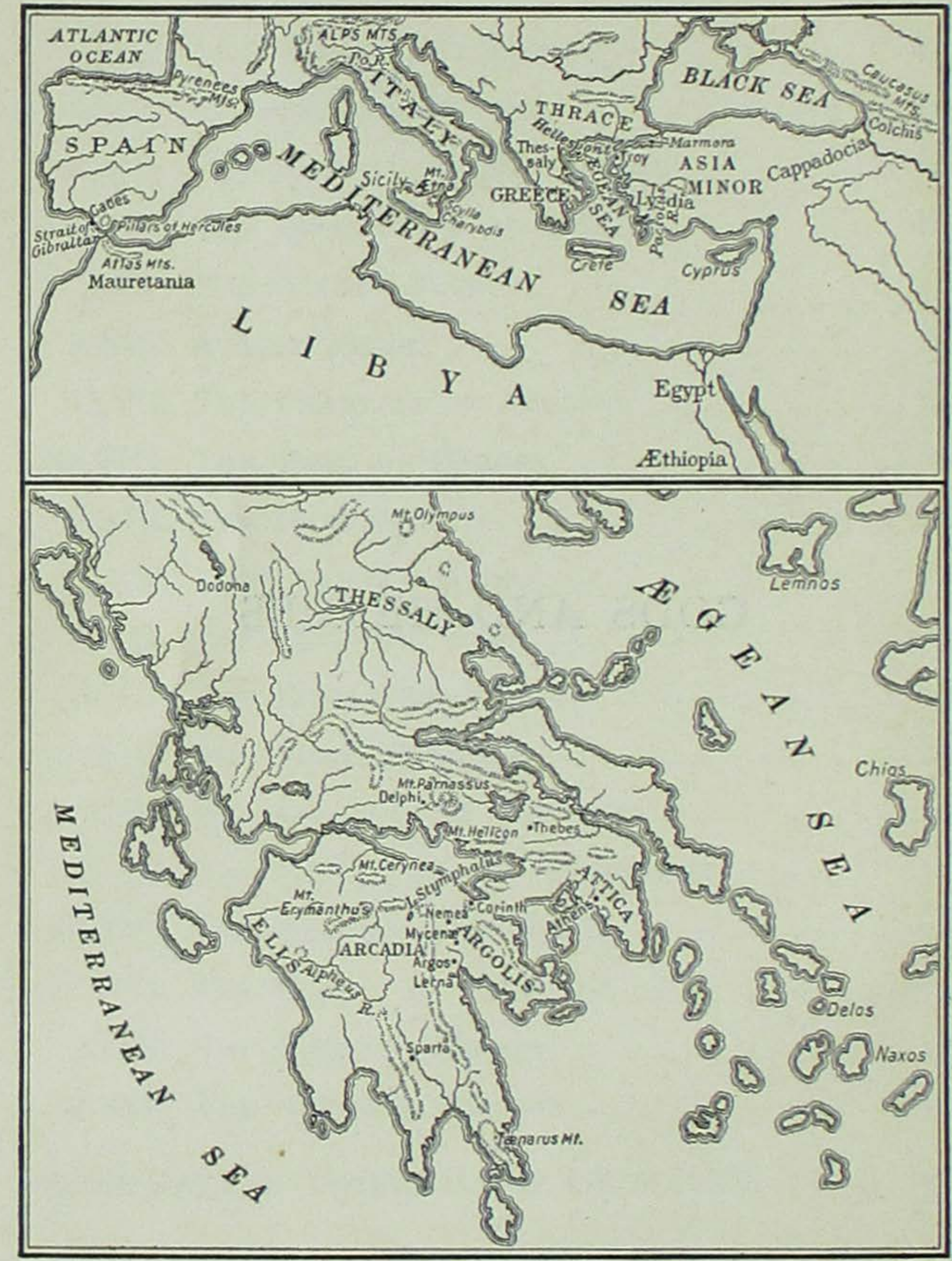
XVIII. Mercury and Iris 132

XIX. Neptune 137

CHAPTER PAGE
XX. THE KING AND QUEEN OF THE DEAD . . . 144
XXI. THE KINGDOM OF HADES 154
XXII. ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE 163
XXIII. THE MAN WHO NEVER DIED 170
XXIV. THE ADVENTURES OF PERSEUS 174
XXV. THE GOLDEN FLEECE 205
XXVI. A LOST SECRET 234
XXVII. THE CHAMPION OF ATHENS 244
XXVIII. THE HERO OF HEROES 264
XXIX. THE NEMEAN LION 272
XXX. THE LERNÆAN HYDRA 275
XXXI. THE CERYNEAN STAG 279
XXXII. THE ERYMANTHIAN BOAR 283
XXXIII. THE AUGEAN STABLES 290
XXXIV. OTHER LABORS OF HERCULES 295
XXXV. THE GARDEN OF THE HESPERIDES 306
XXXVI. THE DESCENT INTO HADES 316
XXXVII. THE CHOICE OF HERCULES 324
XXXVIII. THE TUNIC OF NESSUS 332
XXXIX. THE APPLE OF DISCORD 344

PRONOUNCING VOCABULARY OF NAMES . . . 357

GODS AND HEROES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GREECE
ÆGEAN SEA
Troy
Marmora
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Cyprus
BLACK SEA
Caucasus Mts.
Colchis
Cappadocia
LIBYA
Egypt
Æthiopia
Mt. Olympus
Dodona
THESSALY
ÆGEAN SEA
Lemnos
Chios
Delos
Naxos
Mt. Parnassus
Delphi
Mt. Helicon
Thebes
Mt. Cerynea
L. Stymphalus
Mt. Erymanthus
Nemea
Corinth
ATTICA
Athens
Mycenæ
ARGOLIS
ARCADIA
ELIS
Alpheus R.
Argos
Lerna
Sparta
Tænarus Mt.
MEDITERRANEAN SEA

GREECE AND NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

GODS AND HEROES

CHAPTER I

SATURN AND THE GOLDEN AGE

ONCE upon a time the Sky married the Earth. The Sky's name was Cælus, and the Earth's was Terra. They had a great many children: one of these, the eldest, was called Titan, and another was called Saturn.

Terra, their mother Earth, was good and kind; but their father, Cælus, was unkind and cruel. He hated his own children, and to get rid of them he shut them all up underground, all of them, that is to say, except Saturn, whom he allowed to have his freedom.

Saturn grew up; and he thought of nothing but how to set his brothers free.

At last he went one day to his mother, and asked her what he could do. Terra had come to hate her husband for his cruelty: so she gave Saturn all the iron she had in her veins (you know that iron comes from what are called the veins of the Earth), and he made a great sickle with it. With this sickle he wounded and punished his father so terribly that old Cælus was never good for anything again; indeed, we never hear of him any more, except when we turn his name into Cælum, which is the Latin for 'the sky,' as you know.

Saturn instantly let his brothers out from their underground prison.

They were very grateful to him, and Titan, the eldest, said, "You shall be king of us all, and of all the world, if you will only promise me one thing."

Saturn promised.

"It is this," said Titan. "You know how our father treated us; and how you treated him. Children are plagues, and I don't want you to have anything to do with them. Therefore promise me to eat up all your children, if you ever have any, as soon as they are born. They'll be too young to mind and you'll be safe from them. I think so much of this, that if you don't eat them up, every one, I 'll take the kingdom away from you. For I 'm the eldest, and I might keep it if I pleased instead of giving it up to you."

Saturn had no children then, and he gave the promise. But sometime afterwards he married a goddess, who was good and beautiful. They, too, had many children. But, alas! there was that terrible promise that poor Saturn had made to Titan. Saturn could not break his word, so he ate every child as soon as it was born. Of course the mother was unhappy and miserable: it was worse, thought she, than if he had only shut them underground. But there was the promise, and she did not know what to do.

But she thought and thought, and at last she hit on a plan. When her next child was born, she hid it away, and when Saturn asked for it to eat it, she gave him a big stone instead of the baby. Saturn must have had good teeth, for he ate it up, and only thought that the new baby's bones were uncommonly hard. The trick answered so well that when the next child was born she did it again; and again she did it a third time. She named the three children that she saved in this way, Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto.

Jupiter, the eldest, was a fine, strong child. He made such a noise with his crying that his mother was afraid Saturn would hear him. So she sent him away to the island of Crete, southeast of Greece, where he was brought up on goat's milk. She ordered his nurses to make all the noise they could with drums, trumpets, and cymbals all day and all night long, that nobody might hear him cry and so find out that he was alive.

But unluckily her secret was found out by Titan. Titan thought Saturn had been breaking his word; so he made war on him, and very nearly conquered him and took his kingdom from him.

Jupiter, however, heard the noise of the battle through all the cymbals, trumpets, and drums. He was only a year old, but so big and strong that he rushed out of Crete, and fought a most desperate battle against his uncles, the Titans, to save his father, Saturn. The Titans were wonderful people. All were giants; and one of them had a hundred arms. They threw mountains instead of stones. But Jupiter conquered them at last, and set his father free.

But somehow Saturn was very much afraid of his son. I think I should have been afraid of you if you had been such a wonderful baby. In some way or other, I don't know how, he tried to get rid of Jupiter, and made himself so unpleasant that Jupiter had to take his kingdom away from him, and make himself king. That is how Jupiter became king of all the gods and goddesses.

Saturn, when he lost his kingdom, went to Italy, where a king received him very kindly. They became such friends that the king finally had Saturn reign with him; and Saturn ruled so well that he made his people the happiest in all the world. Everybody was perfectly good and perfectly happy. Saturn's reign on earth is called the golden age. His wife was with him, and was as good as he; so he had peace at last after all his troubles, which had no doubt taught him to be wise.

CHAPTER II

THE GODS AND THE GIANTS

WHEN Jupiter became god and king of the whole world, he made his two brothers, Neptune and Pluto, kings under him. He made Neptune god and king of the sea: Pluto he made god and king of Hades. Hades was a world underground, in the middle of the earth, where men and women go and live when they die.

The next thing that Jupiter did was to marry Juno. Their wedding was the most wonderful that ever was seen. Invitations were sent out to the gods and nymphs. The nymphs were a sort of fairies: some of them waited upon the goddesses; some of them lived in rivers, brooks, and trees. All came to the wedding, except one.

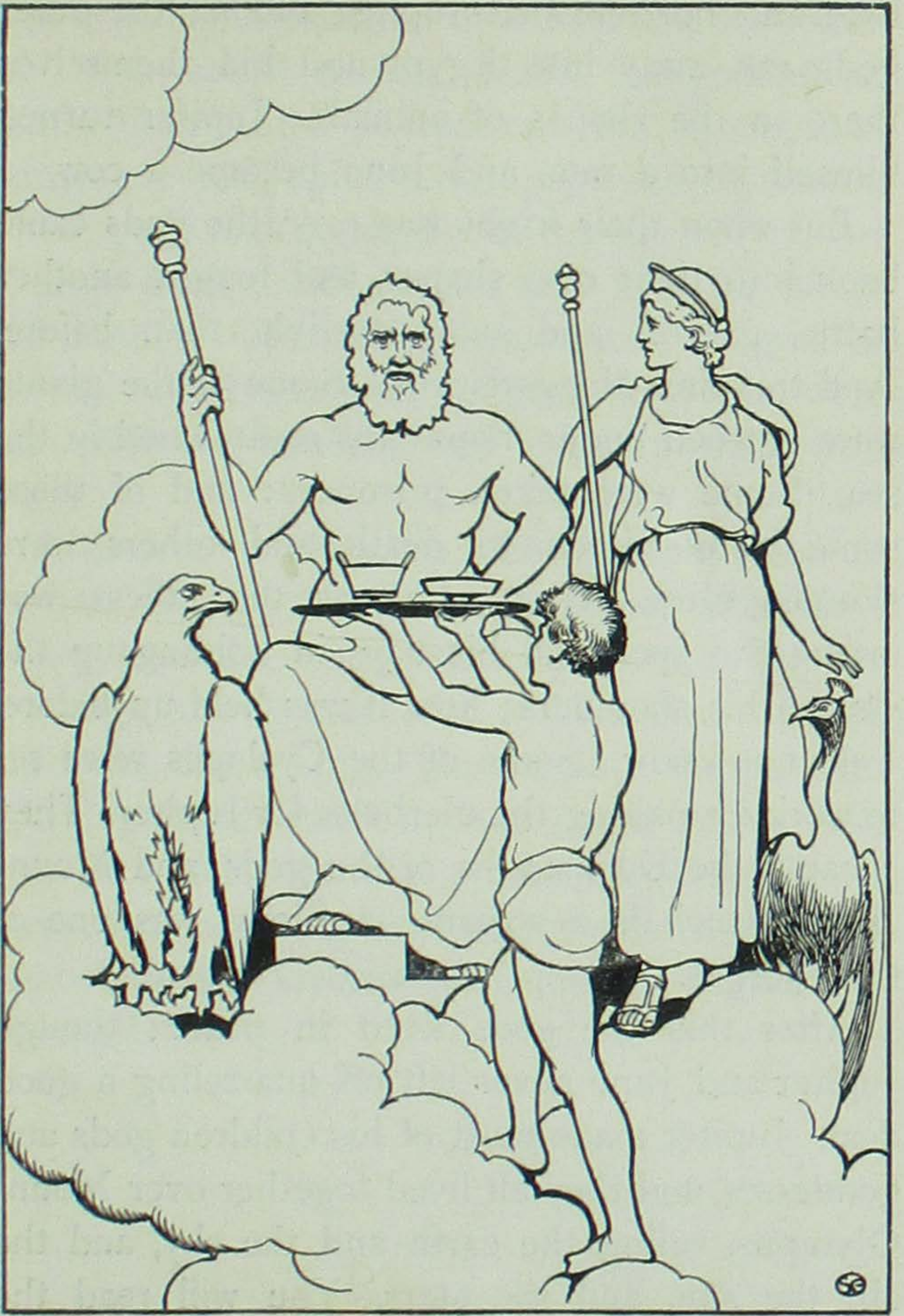
She refused to come: and, besides that, she laughed at the whole thing. When they told her that Jupiter was going to marry Juno, she laughed so loud that Jupiter himself could hear her. I don't know why she thought it so ridiculous, but I can guess pretty well. I suppose she knew Juno's bad temper better than Jupiter did, and how Jupiter was just the sort of husband to spoil any wife's temper. But Jupiter was fond of Juno just then, and he did not like to be laughed at on his wedding day. So he had the offending nymph turned into a tortoise, that she might never be able to laugh again. Nobody ever heard a tortoise laugh, nor ever will.

Jupiter and Juno set up their palace in the sky, just over the top of Mount Olympus, a high mountain in the north of Greece. And soon, I am sorry to say, his quarrels with Juno began, so that, after all, the poor nymph had been right in not thinking much of the grand wedding.

Jupiter always kept Juno for his queen; but he cared for a great many Titanesses and nymphs much more than he did for her, and married more of them than anybody can reckon, one after another. This made Juno angry, and they used to quarrel terribly. But something was going to happen which was almost as bad as quarreling, and which must have made Jupiter envy the peace and comfort of old Saturn, who had become only an earthly king.

The Titans made another war. And this time they got the help of the giants, who were more terrible even than the Titans. They were immense monsters, some almost as tall as the tallest mountain, fearfully strong, and horribly ugly, with hair miles long, and rough beards down to their middle. One of them had fifty heads and a hundred hands. Another had serpents instead of legs. Others, called Cyclopes, had only one eye, which was in the middle of their foreheads. But the most terrible of all was a giant named Typhon. He had a hundred heads, each like a dragon's, and darted flames from his mouth and eyes.

A great battle was fought between the gods and the giants. The giants tried to get into the sky by piling up the mountains one upon another. They used oak trees for clubs, and threw hills for stones. They set whole forests on fire, and tossed them up like torches to set fire to the sky. And at last Typhon's hundred fiery mouths set up a hundred different yells and roars all at once, so

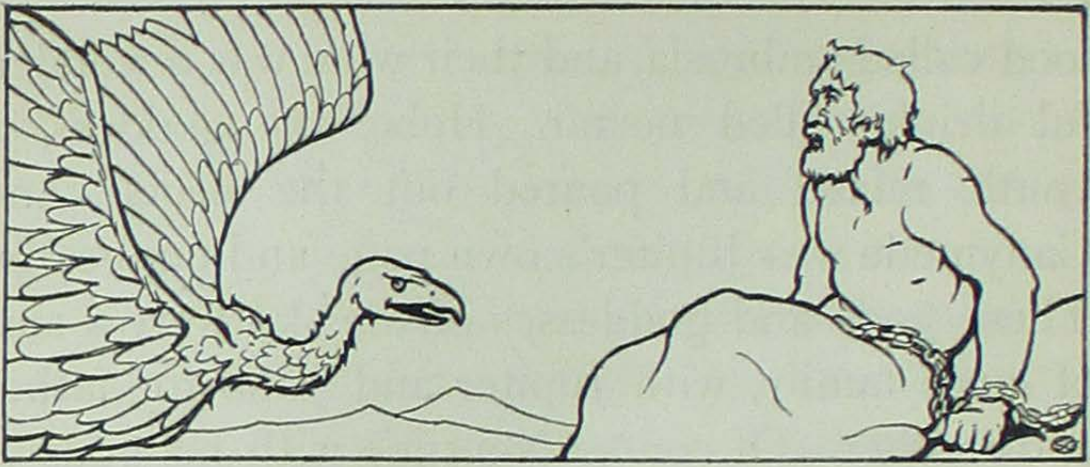


loud and horrible that Jupiter and all the other gods ran away into Egypt and hid themselves there in the shapes of animals. Jupiter turned himself into a ram, and Juno became a cow.

But when their fright was over, the gods came back into their own shapes, and fought another battle, greater and more terrible than before. And this time the gods won. Some of the giants were crushed under mountains or drowned in the sea. Some were taken prisoners: and of these some were beaten to death and others were skinned alive. Atlas, who was the tallest, was ordered to spend all his days in holding up the sky on his shoulders; how it was held up before, I do not know. Some of the Cyclopes were set to work in making thunderbolts for Jupiter. They became the blacksmiths of the gods, and Mount Ætna, which is a volcano in Sicily, was one of their forges.

After this the gods lived in peace: though Jupiter and Juno never left off quarreling a good deal. Jupiter made most of his children gods and goddesses, and they all lived together over Mount Olympus, ruling the earth and the sky, and the air, the sun, and the stars. You will read the stories of all of them. They used to eat a delicious food called ambrosia, and their wine was a wonderful drink called nectar. Hebe, the goddess of youth, mixed and poured out the nectar, and Ganymede was Jupiter's own page and cupbearer. These gods and goddesses of the sky were a sort of large family, with Jupiter and Juno for father and mother. Of course Neptune with his gods of the sea, and Pluto with his gods of Hades, were like different families, and lived in their own places.

Whenever it thunders, that is the voice of Jupiter. One of the planets is named after him; it is a beautiful white star. In pictures Jupiter is a large, strong man, with a thick brown beard, and looks like a king. He sits on a throne, with lightning in his hand, and an eagle by his side. Juno is a tall, beautiful woman, looking like a queen, with a proud face and splendid eyes. The peacock is her favorite bird, just as Jupiter's is the eagle.



CHAPTER III

THE FIRST MAN; OR, PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA

ONE of the Titans left two sons, Prometheus and Epimetheus. Now the word 'Prometheus' means 'forethought,' and 'Epimetheus' means 'afterthought.' Prometheus was not big and strong like the other Titans, but he was more clever and cunning than all of them put together. "Well," he said, "we can't conquer the gods by fighting, that 's clear. But there are cleverer ways of winning than by fighting, as they shall see."

So Prometheus dug up a good-sized lump of clay, more than six feet long, and nearly four feet round. "And now," he said to himself, "I only want just one little spark of Heavenly Fire."

Now the Heavenly Fire was only to be found in the sky; and Jupiter had ordered that no Titan should ever enter the sky again. But Prometheus was much too clever to find any difficulty about that. The great goddess Minerva, who was the goddess of wisdom, happened to be on a visit to the earth just then, so Prometheus called on her and said, "Great goddess, I am only a poor, beaten Titan, and I have never seen the sky. But my father and my father's father used to live there in the good old times, and I should like, just once, to see the inside of the beautiful blue place above the clouds which was once their home. Please, great goddess, let me go in just once, and I'll promise to do no harm."

Now Minerva did not like to break the rule. But she was very trusting and very good-natured, because she was very wise; besides, Prometheus looked such a poor little creature, so different from all the other Titans and giants, and she said, "You certainly don't look as if you could do us any harm, even if you tried. Very well, you shall have a look at the sky, and I'll show you round."

So she directed Prometheus to follow her up Mount Olympus; but she did not notice a little twig that he carried in his hand: and if she had noticed it, she would not have thought it mattered. Wise people don't notice all the little things that cunning people do. Then she opened the golden gate of the sky, and let him in. She was very kind, and showed him everything. He went over the palace of the gods, and saw Jupiter's great ivory throne, and his eagle, and the brewhouse where the nectar was made. He looked at the places behind the clouds, where they kept the rain and snow. Then they looked at all the stars; and at last they came to the stables of the sun. For you must know that the sun is a great fiery car, drawn by four white horses from the east to the west, and is put away in a stable during the nighttime, where the four horses eat wheat made of gold.

"Now you have seen everything," said the goddess; "and you must go."

"Thank you," said Prometheus. And he went back to earth again. But just as he was leaving, he touched one of the wheels of the sun with the little twig, so that a spark came off on the end.

The spark was still there when he got home. He touched his lump of clay with the spark of Heavenly Fire, and, lo and behold, the lump of clay became a living man.

"There!" said Prometheus. "There's something that will give the gods more trouble than anything else that ever was made."

It was the first man.

Jupiter soon found out what Prometheus had done, and was much vexed and annoyed. He forgave Minerva, who was his favorite daughter, but he said to Vulcan, the god of fire, "Make something that will trouble the man even more than the man will trouble me."

So the god of fire took another lump of clay, and a great deal of Heavenly Flame, and made the first woman.

All the gods admired her very much; for she had been made nicely, better than the man.

Jupiter said to her, "My child, go to Prometheus and give him my compliments, and tell him to marry you."

The gods and goddesses thought it a good idea, and all of them made her presents for her wedding. One gave her beauty, another wit, another fine clothes, and so on; but Jupiter gave her a little box, which was not to be opened till her wedding day.

Prometheus was sitting one day at his door, thinking how clever he was, when he saw, coming down Olympus, the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

"Who are you?" he asked, as soon as she came close. "From where do you come?"

"My name is Pandora," she said. "And I am come from the skies to marry you."

"With all my heart," said Prometheus. "You will be a very nice wife, I am sure. But—let me see—'Pandora' means 'all-gifted,' does n't it? What have you to give me, to keep house on?"

"The gods have given me everything," replied Pandora. "I bring you beauty, wit, love, wisdom, health, wealth, virtue, fine clothes—in a word, everything that you can wish for."

"And that little box, what have you in that?"

"Oh, that 's only a little box that Jupiter gave me. I don't know what 's in that, for it is not to be opened till after we 're married. Perhaps it is diamonds."

"Who gave it you?"

"Jupiter."

"Oho!" thought the cunning Prometheus, for secret boxes from Jupiter were not to his fancy. "My dear," he said to Pandora, "on second thoughts I don't think I will marry you. But as you 've had so much trouble in coming, I 'll send you to my brother Epimetheus, and you shall marry him. He'll do just as well."

So Pandora went on to Epimetheus, and he married her. But Prometheus had sent him a private message not to open the box that had been given by Jupiter. So it was put away, and everything went on very well for a long time.

But, at last, Pandora happened to be alone in the house, and she could not resist the temptation to take just one little peep into the box to see what was inside. Such a little box could not hold any harm: and it might be the most beautiful present of all. Anyhow, she could do no harm by lifting the lid; she could easily shut the box up again. She felt she was doing what would displease Epimetheus, and was rather ashamed of her curiosity, but — well, she did open the box.

And then — out there flew thousands and thousands of creatures, like a swarm of wasps and flies, buzzing and darting about with joy to be free. Out at the window, and over the world they flew. Alas! they were all the evil things that are in the world to torment and hurt mankind. Those flies from Pandora's box were War, Pain, Grief, Anger, Sickness, Sorrow, Poverty, Death, Sin.

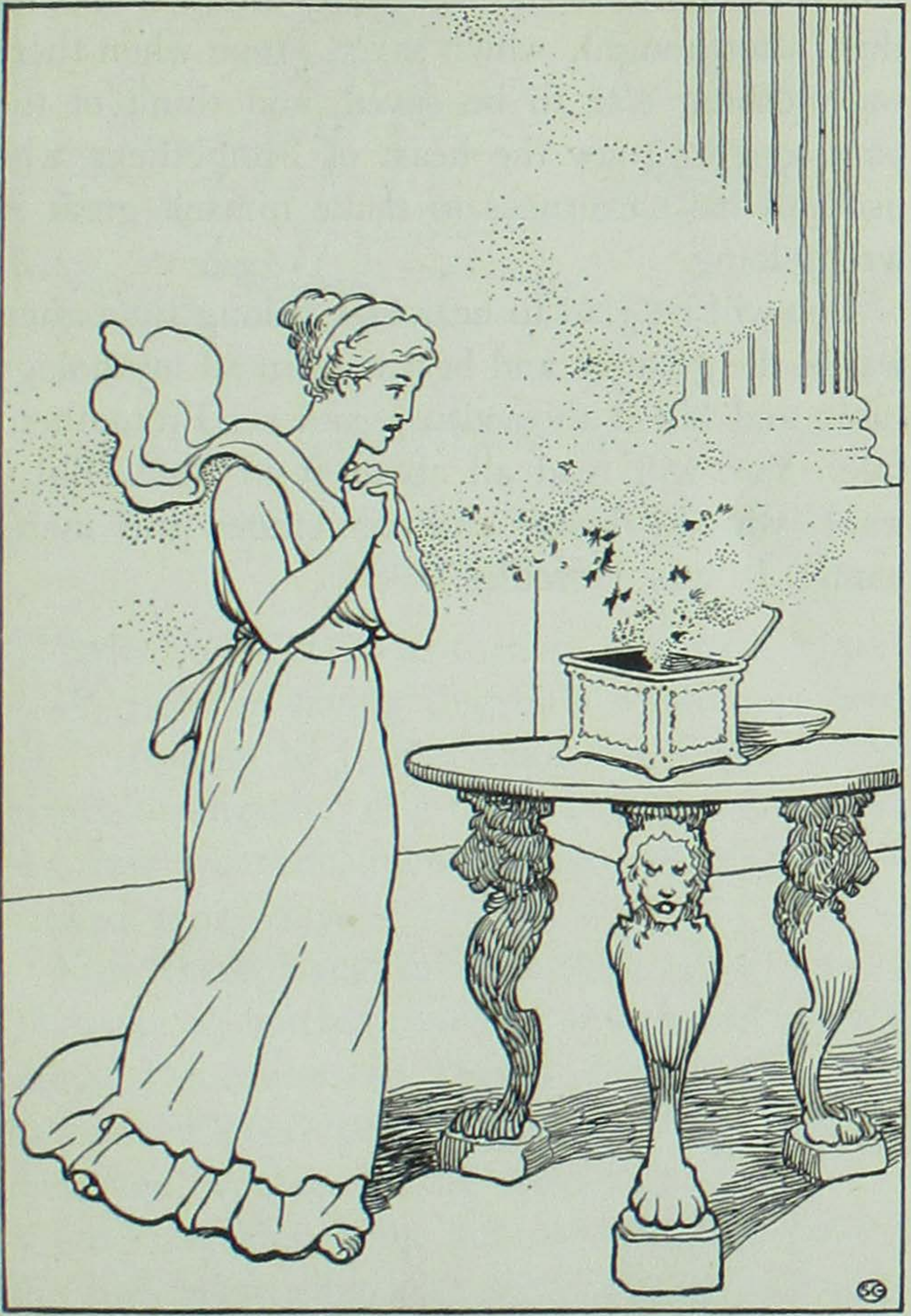
Pandora was frightened. What could she do? She could not get them back into the box again; she could only scream and wring her hands.

Epimetheus heard her cries, and did all he could: he shut down the lid, just in time to keep the very last of the swarm from flying away. By good luck, it was the only one worth keeping, a little creature called Hope, who still lives in the box to comfort us when the others are stinging us, and to make us say, "There is good in everything, even in the box of Pandora."

But Jupiter, when he heard how Prometheus had refused to marry Pandora, and had tried to outwit him again, was very angry indeed. He sent down one of the gods, who took Prometheus and carried him to Mount Caucasus, and bound him with chains to the highest and coldest peak. And a vulture was sent to gnaw his heart forever.

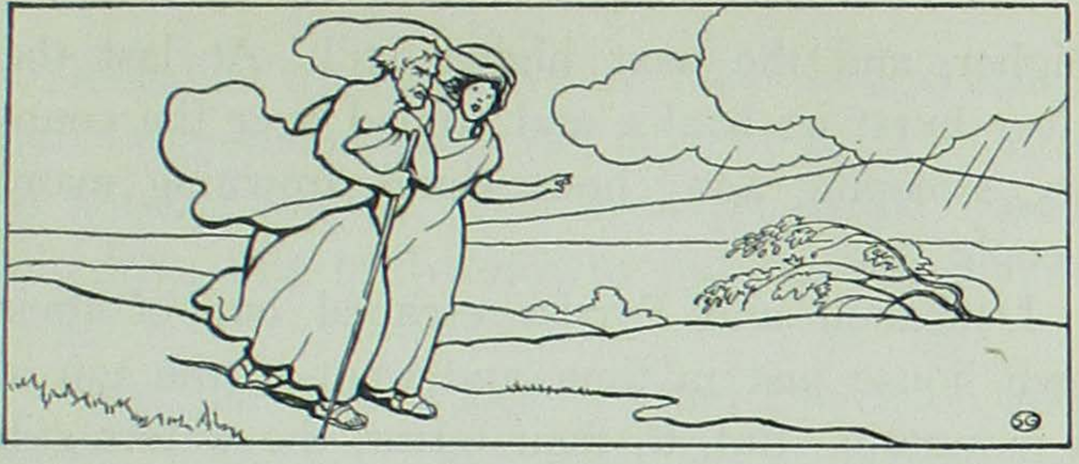
So cunning could not conquer the strength of the gods after all.

I have something to say about this story, which you may not quite understand now, but which you will, some day, when you read it again. Think how man is made of dead common clay, but with one spark of Heavenly Fire straight from the sky. Think how woman is made, with less clay,



but with more of the Heavenly Fire. Think of that 'afterthought,' which saved Hope when there was nothing else to be saved, and think of the pain sent to gnaw the heart of Prometheus, who used all his cleverness to make himself great in wrongdoing.

You will be glad to hear how, a long time afterwards, the greatest and best man in all mythology came and killed the vulture, and set Prometheus free. You will read all about it in time. But I want you to know and remember the man's name. It was Hercules.



CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT FLOOD; OR, DEUCALION AND PYRRHA

PROMETHEUS turned out to be quite right in saying that men would give more trouble to Jupiter than the Titans or the giants, or anything else that had ever been made. As time went on, men became more and more wicked every day.

Now there lived on the bank of a river in Thessaly, in northern Greece, a man and his wife, named Deucalion and Pyrrha. I think they must have been good people, and not like the other men and women in the world.

One day Deucalion noticed that the water in the river was rising very high. He did not think much of it at the time, but the next day it was higher, and the next higher still. At last the river burst its banks, and spread over the country, sweeping away houses and drowning many people.

Deucalion and Pyrrha escaped out of their own house just in time, and went to the top of a mountain. But, to their terror, the waters still kept on spreading and rising, until all the plain of Thessaly looked like a sea, and the tops of the hills like islands.

"The water will cover the hills soon," said Deucalion, "and then the mountains. What shall we do?"

Pyrrha thought for a moment, and then said, "I have heard that there is a very wise man on the top of Mount Caucasus who knows everything. Let us go to him, and perhaps he will tell us what to do and what all this water means."

So they went down the other side, and walked on and on till they reached the great Caucasian Mountains, which are the highest in all Europe, and are always covered with snow. They climbed up to the highest peak, and there they saw a man, chained to the ice, with a vulture tearing and gnawing him. It was Prometheus, who had made the first man.

Deucalion tried to drive the horrible bird away. But Prometheus said, "It is no use. You can do nothing for me. Not even the Great Flood will drive this bird away, or put me out of my pain."

"Ah! the Great Flood!" cried Deucalion and Pyrrha together. "We have left it behind us; are we safe up here?"

"You are safe nowhere," said Prometheus. "Soon the waters will break over the mountains round Thessaly and spread over the whole world. They will rise and rise till not even this peak will be seen. Jupiter is sending this flood to sweep away from the face of the earth the wickedness of man. Not one is to be saved. Even now there is nobody left alive but you two."

Deucalion and Pyrrha looked: and, in the distance, they saw the waters coming on, and rising above the hills.

"But perhaps," said Promethеus, "Jupiter may not wish to punish *you*. I cannot say. But I will tell you what to do; it *may* save you. Go down the mountain till you come to a wood, and cut down a tree."

Then he told them how to make a boat; for nobody knew anything about boats in those days.

He bade them good-by, and they went down the hill sorrowfully, wishing they could help Prometheus, and doubting if they could help themselves.

They came to the wood, and made the boat, just in time. The water rose; but their little boat rose with it. At last even the highest peak of Caucasus was covered, and they could see nothing but the sky above them and the waters round. Then the clouds gathered and burst, and the sky and the sea became one great storm.

For nine days and nights their little boat was tossed about by the winds and waves. But on the tenth day, as if by magic, the sky cleared, the water went down, and their boat was left high and dry on the top of a hill.

They knelt and thanked Jupiter, and went down the hill hand in hand, the only man and the only woman in the whole world. They did not even know where they were.

But presently they met, coming up the hill, a form like a woman, only grander and more beautiful. They were afraid. But at last they had courage to ask, "Who are you? And where are we?"

"This hill is Mount Parnassus. I am the goddess Justice," she said. "I have finished my work upon the earth, and am on my way home to the sky. I know your story. Live, and be good, and be warned by what has happened to all other men."

"But what is the use of our living?" they asked, "and what is the use of this great world to us two? For we have no children to come after us when we die."

"What you say is just," answered the goddess. "Jupiter will be pleased enough to give this empty world to a wiser and better race of men. But he will be quite as content without them. In short, you may have companions, if you want them, and if you will teach them to be better and wiser than the old ones. Only you must make them for yourselves."

"But how can we make men?" they asked.

"I will tell you. Throw your grandmother's bones behind you without looking round."

"Our grandmother's bones? But how are we to find them after this flood, or to know which are hers?"

"The gods tell people what to do, but not how it is to be done." And she vanished into the air.

I think the goddess Justice was right. All of us are taught what we ought to do; but we are usually left to ask ourselves whether any particular thing is right or wrong.

Deucalion and Pyrrha asked one another; but neither knew what to say. The whole world, after the Great Flood, was full of bones everywhere. Which were their grandmother's, and where? They wandered about over half the world trying to find them, but all in vain, till they thought they should have to give it up in despair.

At last, however, Pyrrha spoke to Deucalion: "I have a thought. We are all called the children of Jupiter, you know, because he is called the father of gods and men. And Jupiter and all the gods are the children of Cælus and Terra. Now, if we are the children of Jupiter, and Jupiter is the child of Terra, then Terra must be our grandmother. And Terra is the Earth; so our grandmother is the Earth, you see."

"But," Deucalion then asked, "what about the bones?"

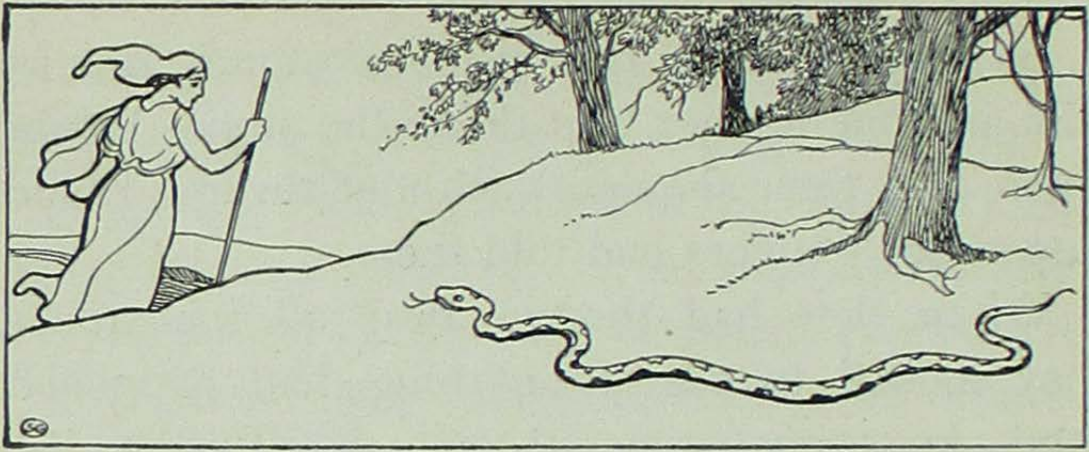
"What are the bones of the Earth but the stones?" said Pyrrha. "The stones must be our grandmother's bones."

"I don't think you 're right," said Deucalion. "It 's much too easy a thing, only to throw a few stones. But there 's no harm in trying."

So they gathered two heaps of stones, one for him and one for her, and threw the stones behind them, over their shoulders, without turning round, just as the goddess had told them.

When they had thrown away all the stones, they looked to see if anything had happened. And, lo, every stone thrown by Pyrrha had become a woman, and every stone thrown by Deucalion had become a man.

So they kept on throwing stones till the world was full of men and women again. And Deucalion and Pyrrha became their king and queen.



CHAPTER V

LATONA AND NIOBE

JUPITER once fell in love with a beautiful Titaness named Latona. This made Juno terribly angry: so she sent a huge and horrible snake to hunt Latona all over the world. And she went to Terra, and made her swear not to give Latona a resting place or a hiding place.

So poor Latona was hunted and driven about night and day. She finally went to our grandmother, the Earth, and begged for a corner to rest in or a cave to hide in.

But old Terra said, "No. I have sworn to Juno that you shall have no rest in me."

At last, in her despair, she went to Neptune, and prayed him to hide her in his waters, since Earth had refused her.

Neptune replied, "I wish I could, with all my heart; but what place is there, in the sea or on the land, where you can hide from Juno, the queen of the sky? But wait; there 's one thing that nobody knows of but I. There is an island under the sea; and this island is always moving and wandering about, so that nobody can see it, or tell where it may chance to be, for it is never in the same place two minutes together. It is n't sea, because it 's land; but it does n't belong to Terra, because it 's under the sea, and has no bottom. I 'll tell you what I 'll do for you. I 'll fix it where nobody can find it, and you 'll be safe there, because it 's neither earth nor sea."

So Neptune anchored the floating island in a part of the Ægean Sea. The island is called Delos; and it is there still, just where it was fixed by Neptune for Latona.

Latona went and lived there, safe from Juno and the great snake. After a time she had two children, a son and a daughter. The son was named Apollo, and the daughter Diana.

Both were beautiful, but Apollo was the most beautiful boy ever born. He was a wonderful child in every way. The instant he was born he made a bow and arrow, and went across the sea, and found the huge serpent, and killed him. When he was four years old, he built one of the wonders of the world, a great altar to the gods, made of the horns of the goats that his sister Diana used to hunt and shoot in the mountains.

With two such children to help her, Latona no longer felt afraid of Juno. So she left Delos, and came, with her two children, into a country of Asia Minor.

Now there was a Grecian princess, named Niobe, who had fourteen beautiful children, seven daughters and seven sons. She was fond and proud of them, and she did not like to hear people talking about Latona's wonderful children.

"What signifies a miserable couple of children, when I have fourteen?" she used to say. "*I* don't think much of Latona;" and in her jealousy she never lost a chance of insulting the mother of Apollo and Diana.

Of course these insults came to Latona's ears. Apollo and Diana heard of them too; and they resolved to punish the proud princess who insulted and scorned their mother. I scarcely like to tell you of how they punished Niobe, for I cannot think of anything more cruel.

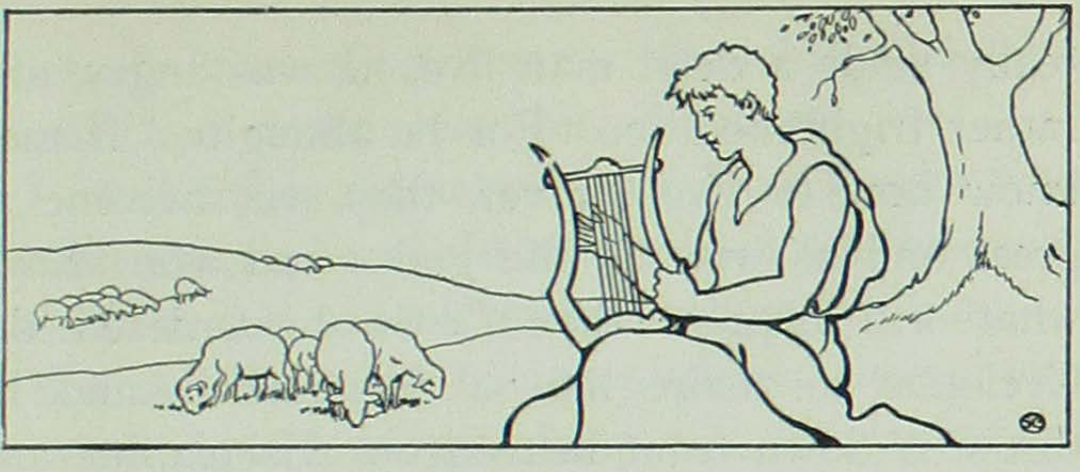
Each of them took a bow and seven arrows. Apollo shot with his arrows all the seven sons of Niobe. Diana shot six of Niobe's seven daughters, leaving only one alive.

"There!" they said; "what signifies a miserable one child when our mother has two?"

When poor Niobe saw her children killed before her, she wept bitterly, and she could not stop her tears. They flowed on and on, until she cried herself into stone.

As for Apollo, he kept on growing handsomer and stronger until he became a god, the most glorious of all the gods in the sky. Jupiter made him the god of the sun, and made his sister, Diana, goddess of the moon. He was also the god of all beautiful and useful things: of music, painting, poetry, medicine. Several names were given to him. One of his names is 'Phœbus,' which means the 'Bright' or 'Radiant.' 'Apollo' means 'Destroyer': people must guess for themselves why he was called 'Destroyer.'

In pictures and statues he is always made graceful, beautiful, and young, with long waving hair. Sometimes he carries a lyre (a sort of small harp) and sometimes a bow. Often he wears a wreath of laurel. You must take a great deal of notice of Apollo, or Phœbus, because he is the most famous of all the gods next to Jupiter. It will help you to know him if you think of him as always beautiful, wise, and bright, but sometimes rather cruel and hard, just as the sun's rays are at times.



CHAPTER VI

THE FLAYED PIPER; OR, APOLLO AND MARSYAS

THE men who filled the earth after the Great Flood were much more clever than people are now. A king's son named Cadmus invented the alphabet, which is, perhaps, the most wonderful thing in the world. And when he wanted to build the city of Thebes, he got a great musician, named Amphion, to play to the stones and trees, so that they, by dancing to his tunes, built themselves into walls and houses without the help of any masons or carpenters.

At last men became so wonderfully clever in everything, that a physician named Æsculapius, who was a son of Apollo, found out how to bring back dead people to life again.

But when Jupiter heard that Æsculapius had really made a dead man live, he was angry, and rather frightened too. For he thought, "If men know how to live forever, they will become as great and as wise as the gods: and who knows what will happen then?" So he ordered the Cyclopes to make him a thunderbolt, and he threw it down from heaven on Æsculapius and killed him.

No other man knew the secret of Æsculapius, and it died with him.

But Apollo loved his son, and was in a great rage with Jupiter for having killed him. He could not punish Jupiter, but he took his bow and arrows and shot all the Cyclopes who had made the thunderbolt.

Then it was Jupiter's turn to be angry with Apollo for killing his servants, who had only done what they were told to do. He sentenced him to be banished from the sky for nine years.

So Apollo came down to the earth, bringing with him nothing but his lyre. You know that Mount Olympus, where the gods live, is in Thessaly, so that Thessaly was the country in which Apollo found himself when he came down from the sky. He did not know what to do with himself for the nine years, so he went to a king of

Thessaly named Admetus, who received him kindly and made him his shepherd.

I don't think Admetus could have known who Apollo was, or he would hardly have set the great god of the sun to look after his sheep for him.

But Apollo spent his time pleasantly enough in watching the king's sheep and in playing on his lyre.

Now there was a clever but conceited musician named Marsyas, who had invented the flute, and who played on it better than anybody else in the world. One day Marsyas happened to be passing through Thessaly, when he saw a shepherd by a brook watching his sheep, and playing to them beautifully on a lyre.

He went up to the shepherd, and said, "You play nicely, my man. But nobody can do much with those harps and fiddles and trumpery stringed things. You should learn the flute; then you 'd know what music means."

"Indeed?" said Apollo. "I 'm sorry, for your sake, that your ears are so hard to please. As for me, I don't care for whistles and squeaking machines."

"Ah!" said Marsyas, "that 's because you never heard me."

"And you dare to tell me," said Apollo, "that you put a wretched squeaking flute before the lyre, which makes music for the gods in the sky?"

"And you dare to say," said Marsyas, "that a miserable twanging, tinkling lyre is better than a flute? What an ignorant blockhead you must be!"

At last their wrangling about their instruments grew to quarreling; and then Apollo said, "We shall never settle the question in this way. We will go to the next village and give a concert. You shall play your flute and I will play my lyre, and the people shall say which is the better, yours or mine."

"With all my heart," said Marsyas. "I know what they will say. But we must have a wager on it. What shall it be?"

"We will bet our skins," said Apollo. "If I lose, you shall skin me; and if you lose, I will skin you."

"Agreed," said Marsyas.

So they went to the next village, and called the people together to judge between the flute and the lyre.

Marsyas played first. He played a little simple tune on his flute so beautifully that everybody was charmed. But Apollo then played the same tune on his lyre, even more beautifully still.

Then Marsyas took his flute again and played all sorts of difficult flourishes, runs, and shakes, and he played them in the most amazing manner, till the people thought they had never heard anything so wonderful. Indeed, never had such flute playing been heard.

But Apollo, instead of following him in the same fashion, only played another simple tune; but this time he sang while he played.

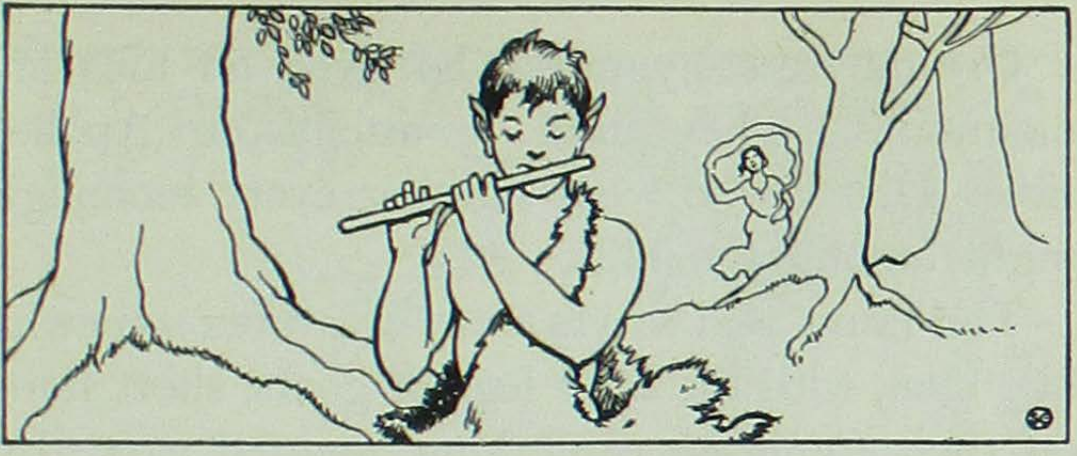
You can imagine how gloriously the god of music sang. You can fancy how much chance Marsyas had of winning when Apollo's voice was carrying the hearts of the people away.

"There," said Apollo, when he had finished, "beat that if you can; or give me your skin."

"It is not fair," said Marsyas. "This is not a singing match: the question is, Which is the better instrument, the flute or the lyre?"

"It *is* fair," said Apollo. "If you can sing while you are playing the flute, then I have nothing to say. But you can't sing, you see, because you have to use your lips and your breath in blowing into those holes. Is not that instrument best which makes you sing best, yes or no? And if I must n't use my breath, you must n't use yours."

You must judge for yourself which was right. But the people decided for Apollo. And so Apollo, having won the wager, took Marsyas and skinned him, and hung his body on a tree.



CHAPTER VII

MIDAS THE AVARICIOUS

THERE were other beings besides men on the earth in those days. You ought to know something about them now, because Apollo, while he was banished from the sky, had a great deal to do with them. These beings were called nymphs, fauns, and satyrs.

The nymphs were a kind of beautiful fairies.

Dryads were nymphs who lived in forests.

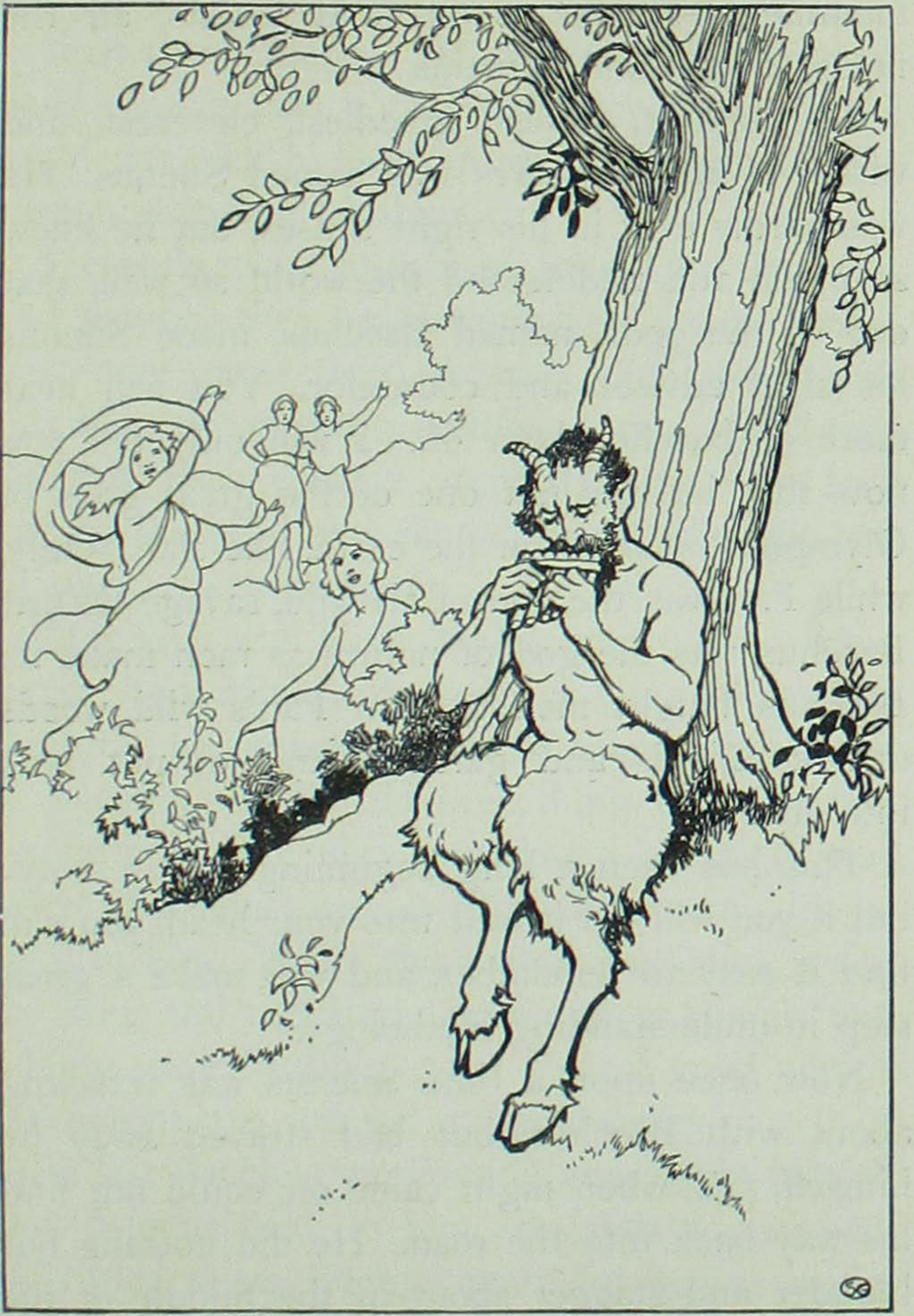
Hamadryads were nymphs who lived in trees. Every tree has a hamadryad, who lives in it, who is born when it first grows, and who dies when it dies. So that a hamadryad is killed whenever a tree is cut down.

Naiads were nymphs belonging to brooks and rivers. Every stream has its naiad.

Oreads were nymphs who lived on hills and mountains. They used to attend on Apollo's sister Diana, who went hunting every moonlight night among the hills.

The fauns and satyrs were creatures somewhat like men, with the hind legs of goats, short horns on their foreheads, and long pointed ears. But there was a difference between the fauns and the satyrs. The fauns were handsome, gentle, innocent, and rather foolish. The satyrs were hideous, clumsy, hairy monsters, with flat faces, little eyes, and huge mouths; they were great gluttons, and were sometimes mischievous: most of them were dull and stupid, but many of them had plenty of sense and knowledge. The fauns and satyrs lived among the woods and hills, like the dryads and oreads.

The king of all these nymphs, fauns, and satyrs was a god named Pan, who was himself a hideous satyr. He had nothing to do with the gods of Olympus, but lived on the earth, chiefly in a part of Greece called Arcadia. 'Pan' is the Greek for 'all'; you may remember the same word in the name 'Pandora,' in the story called "The First Man." He was called 'Pan' because he was the god of 'all' nature, all the hills and



mountains, all the woods and forests, all the fields, rivers, and streams.

The ugliest, fattest, greediest, cleverest, and wisest of all the satyrs was named Silenus. He was hardly ever in his right senses, but he knew so much and understood the world so well, that one of the gods, named Bacchus, made Silenus his chief adviser and counselor. You will hear more of Bacchus later on. I will only tell you now that he was not one of the great gods of Olympus, but lived on the earth, like Pan. Only, while Pan was the god of all wild, savage nature, Bacchus was the god of nature as men make it: Bacchus taught men to turn Pan's wild woods into cornfields and gardens, and to put bees into hives.

This has been a long beginning to my story; but if you will get it well into your head, you will find it easy to remember, and will make a great step in understanding mythology.

Now once upon a time Silenus was traveling about with Bacchus, but had strayed away by himself, and, when night came on, could not find his way back into the road. He did nothing but blunder and stagger about in the middle of the thick, dark forest, stumbling and sprawling over the roots of the trees, and knocking his head against the branches. At last he gave a tremendous tumble into a bush, and lay there, for he could not pick himself up again. So he went to sleep and snored terribly.

Presently some huntsmen passed by that way, and thought they heard some wild beast roaring. You may guess their surprise when they found this hideous old satyr unable to move. But they did not catch a satyr every day: so they took him by the head and shoulders, and brought him as a prize to the king.

This king was King Midas, who ruled a country in Asia Minor. As soon as King Midas saw the satyr, he guessed him to be Silenus, the friend of Bacchus: so he did everything to make him comfortable. He also sent round about to find where Bacchus was, so that Silenus might go back to him. While the search was being made, the king and the satyr became great friends, and Silenus gave Midas a great deal of good advice, and taught him science and philosophy.

At last Bacchus was found; and Midas himself took Silenus back to him. Bacchus was exceedingly glad to see Silenus again, for he was beginning to be afraid that he had lost him forever.

"Ask any gift you please," he said to King Midas, "and it shall be yours."

"Grant me," said Midas, "that everything I touch shall turn into gold."

Bacchus looked vexed and disappointed. But he was bound by his promise, and said, "It is a fool's wish. But so be it. Everything you touch *shall* turn to gold."

Midas thanked Bacchus, said good-by to Silenus, and went home. How rich he was going to be, the richest king in the whole world! He opened his palace door, and, lo, the door became pure, solid gold. He went from room to room, touching all the furniture, till everything, bedsteads, tables, chairs, all became gold. He got a ladder (which turned into gold in his hands) and touched every brick and stone in his palace, till his whole palace was gold. His horses had golden saddles and golden bridles. His cooks boiled water in golden kettles: his servants swept away golden dust with golden brooms.

When he sat down to dinner, his plate turned to gold. He had become the richest man in the world, thought he with joy and pride, as he helped himself from the golden dish before him. But suddenly his teeth jarred against something hard, harder than bone. Had the cook put a flint into the dish? Alas! it was nothing of the kind. His very food, as soon as it touched his lips, turned to solid gold.

His heart sank within him, while the meat and drink before him mocked his hunger and thirst. Was the richest man in the world to starve? A horrible fear came upon him.

What was he to do? What was the use of all this gold if he could not buy with it a crust of bread or a draft of water? The poorest plowman was now a richer man than the king. He could only wander about his golden palace till his hunger became starvation, and his thirst a fever. In his despair, he set out and followed after Bacchus again, to implore the god to take back the gift of gold.

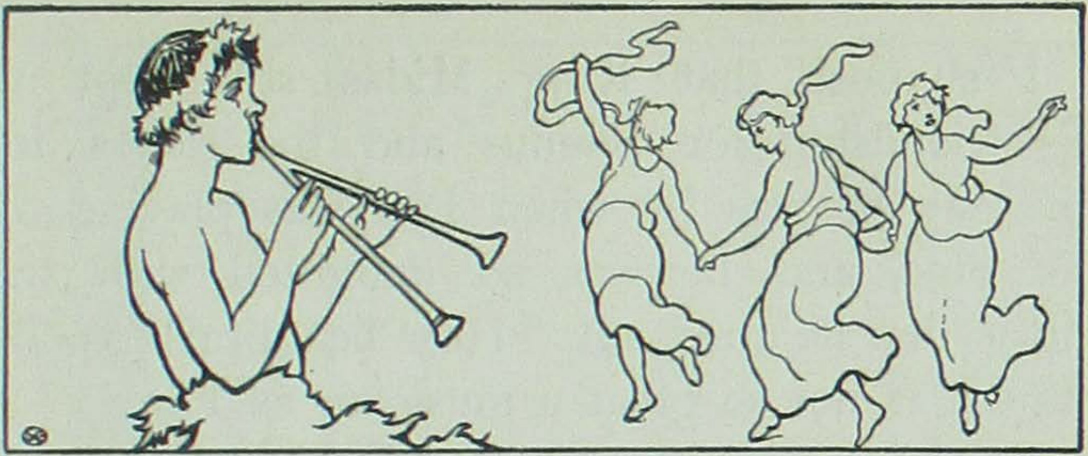
At last, when nearly starved to death, he found him. "What!" said Bacchus, "are you not content yet? Do you want more gold still?"

"Gold!" cried Midas, "I hate the horrible word. I am starving. Make me the poorest man in the whole world. Silenus taught me much; but I have learned for myself that a mountain of gold is not the worth of a single drop of dew."

"I will take back my gift, then," said Bacchus. "But I will not give you another instead of it, because all the gods of Olympus could not give you anything better than this lesson. You may wash away your folly in the first river you come to. Good-by; only don't think that gold is not a good thing because too much of it is a bad thing."

Midas ran to the banks of the river Pactolus, which was hard by. He threw off his golden clothes, and hurried barefoot over the sands of the river; and the sand, wherever his naked feet touched it, turned to gold. He plunged into the water, and swam through to the other side. The curse of the golden touch left him, and he ate and drank, and never hungered after gold again. He had learned that the best thing to do with too much gold was to give it away as fast as possible.

The sand of the river Pactolus, in Asia Minor, is said to have gold in it to this day.



CHAPTER VIII

MIDAS THE CRITIC

ONCE upon a time the god Pan fell in love with a naiad, or water nymph. She was beautiful, as all the nymphs were; but Pan, as you know, was ugly, so ugly that she hated him, and was afraid of him, and would have nothing to do with him. At last, to escape from him, she turned herself into a reed.

But even then Pan did not lose his love for her. He gathered the reed, and made it into a musical instrument. We call it Pan's pipe, after the name of its inventor, and because on this pipe Pan turned into music all his sorrow for the loss of the lovely water nymph, making her sing of the love to which she would not listen while she was alive.

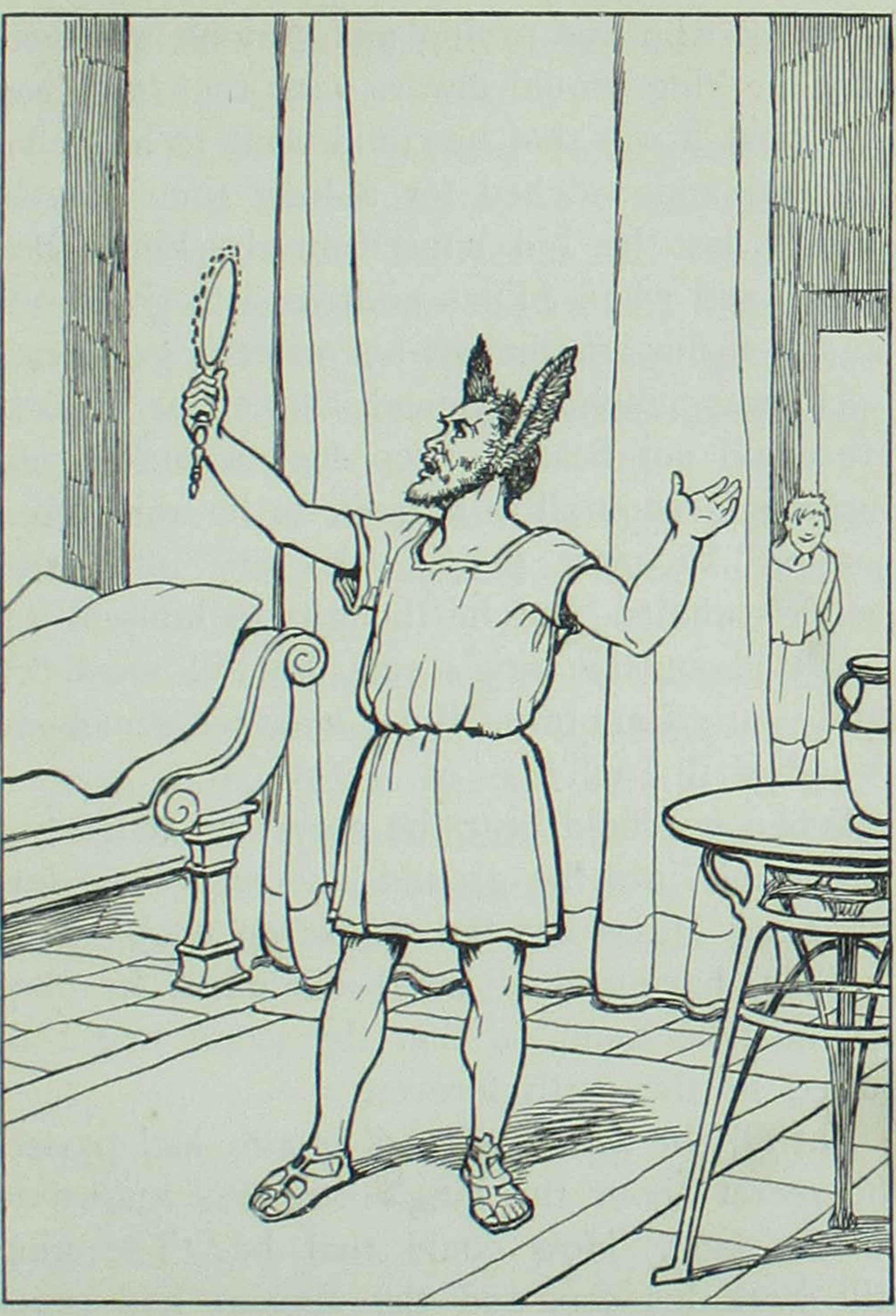
I suppose that King Midas still kept up his friendship for Silenus and the satyrs, for one day he was by when Pan was playing on his pipe, and he was so delighted with the music that he cried out, "How beautiful! Apollo himself is not so great a musician as Pan."

You remember the story of Marsyas, and how angry Apollo was when anybody's music was put before his own? I suppose that some ill-natured satyr must have told him what King Midas had said about him and Pan. Anyway, he was very angry indeed. And Midas, the next time he looked at himself in his mirror, saw that his ears had been changed into those of an ass.

This was to show him what sort of ears those people must have who like the common music of earth better than the music which the gods send down to us from the sky.

But, as you may suppose, it made Midas miserable and ashamed. "All my people will think their king an ass," he thought to himself, "and that would never do."

So he made a large cap to cover his ears, and never took it off, that nobody might see what had happened to him. But one of his



servants, who was prying and curious, wondered why the king should always wear that large cap, and what it was that he could want to hide. He watched and watched for a long time in vain. But at last he hid himself in the king's bedroom; and when Midas undressed to go to bed, he saw to his amazement his master's great ears.

He was much frightened, as well as amazed. He could not bear to keep such a curious and surprising secret all to himself, for he was a great gossip, like most people who pry into other people's affairs. But he thought to himself, "If I tell about the king's ears, he will most certainly cut off my own. But I *must* tell somebody. Whom shall I tell?"

When he could bear the secret no longer, he dug a hole into the ground, and whispered into it, "King Midas has the ears of an ass."

Then, having thus eased his mind, he filled up the hole again, so that the secret might be buried in the earth forever.

But all the same, before a month had passed, the secret about the king's ears was known to all the land. How could that be? The king still wore his cap, and the servant had never dared to speak about it to man, woman, or child

You will never be able to guess how the secret got abroad.

It was in this way. Some reeds grew up out of the place where the servant had made the hole, and of course the reeds had heard what had been whispered into the ground where their roots were. And they were no more able to keep such a wonderful secret to themselves than the servant had been.

Whenever the wind blew through them, they rustled, and their rustle said, " King Midas has the ears of an ass."

The wind heard the words of the reeds, and carried the news through all the land, wherever it blew, " King Midas has the ears of an ass."

And all the people heard the voice of the wind, and said to one another, " What a wonderful thing! King Midas has the ears of an ass."

CHAPTER IX

APOLLO AND THE LAUREL

ONE day Apollo, while following his flock of sheep, met a little boy playing with a bow and arrows.

"That is n't much of a bow you 've got there," said Apollo.

"Is n't it?" smiled the boy. "Perhaps not; but all the same, I don't believe you 've got a better, though you 're so big and I 'm so small."

Now you know that Apollo never could bear to be told that anybody had anything, or did anything, better than he. You remember how he treated Marsyas and Midas for saying the same kind of thing.

So he took his own bow from his shoulder, and showed it to the boy, and said, "As you think you know so much about bows and arrows, look at that; perhaps you 'll say the bow which killed the great serpent that terrified my mother Latona is n't stronger than your trumpery little toy."

The boy took Apollo's bow and tried to bend it; but it was much too strong for him.

"But never mind," he said. "My little bow and arrows are better than your big ones, all the same."

Apollo was half angry and half amused. "You little blockhead! how do you make out that?"

"Because your bow can kill everybody else, but mine can conquer *you*. You shall see."

And so saying he let fly one of his arrows right into Apollo's heart. The arrow was so little that Apollo felt nothing more than the prick of a pin: he only laughed at the boy's nonsense, and went on his way as if nothing had happened.

But Apollo would not have thought so little of the matter if he had known that his heart had been pricked by a magic arrow.

The boy's name was Cupid. You will read a good deal about him both in this book and in others. Oddly enough, though the boy was one of the gods of Olympus, Apollo had never seen him before, and knew nothing about him. Perhaps Cupid had not been born when Apollo was banished from the sky.

However this may be, there is no doubt about what Cupid's arrows could do. If he shot into the hearts of two people at the same time with two of his golden arrows, they loved each other, and were happy. But if he shot only one heart, as he did Apollo's, that person was made to love somebody who did not love him in return, and perhaps hated him: so he became most miserable.

So it happened to Apollo. He became fond of a water nymph named Daphne. But though he was so great and glorious a god, and she only a naiad, she was afraid of him and would have nothing to do with him, for Cupid, out of mischief, shot her heart with one of his leaden arrows, which prevented love. Apollo prayed her to like him; but she could not, and when she saw him coming, she would hide away at the bottom of her river.

But one day she was rambling in a wood a long way from her home. And, to her alarm, she suddenly saw Apollo coming toward her. She took to her heels and ran. She ran very fast indeed; but her river was far away, and

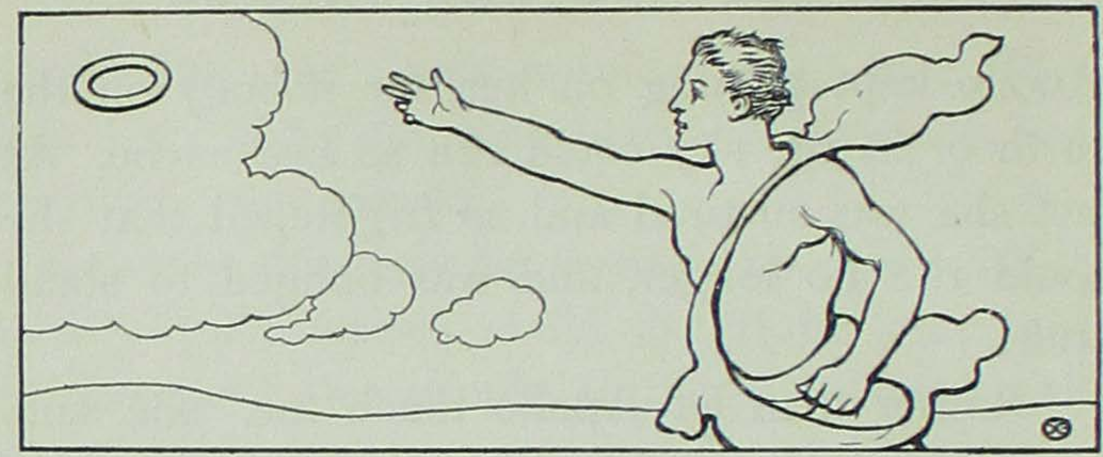
Apollo kept gaining on her, for nobody on the earth or in the sky could run so fast as he. At last she was so tired and so frightened that she could run no longer, and was obliged to stand still.

"Rather than let Apollo touch me," she said, "I would become a hamadryad, and never again be able to run any more than the other wood nymphs."

She wished it so hard that suddenly she felt her feet take root in the earth. Then her arms turned to branches, her fingers turned to twigs, and her hair turned to leaves. And when Apollo reached the spot, he found nothing but a laurel bush growing where Daphne had been.

'Daphne' is the Greek word for 'laurel,' the tree forever after loved by Apollo. You may know Apollo in pictures by his laurel wreath as well as by his lyre and bow.

There is an ancient saying, "Love conquers all things." And that is exactly what Cupid meant by saying that his toy bow was stronger even than the bow which had killed the great serpent, and could conquer with ease even the god of the sun, Apollo.



CHAPTER X

APOLLO AND THE HYACINTH

YOU remember that Apollo and Diana were born in the island of Delos. The part of Delos where they were born was a mountain called Cynthus; and for that reason Apollo was often called Cynthius, and Diana, Cynthia. Bear this in mind, that you may follow the story.

While Apollo was on earth, the king of Sparta engaged him to be the teacher of his son. This boy, named Hyacinthus, was so handsome and so amiable that Apollo became exceedingly fond of him; indeed, he could not bear to be away from his pupil's company.

But the west wind, called Zephyrus, was also fond of the boy, whose chief friend he had been before Apollo came. He was afraid that the king's son liked Apollo best; and this thought filled him with jealousy.

One day, when he was blowing about the king's garden, he saw Apollo and the boy playing at quoits together. Quoits are heavy rings made of iron: each player takes one, and throws it with all his strength at a peg fixed in the ground, and the one who throws his quoit nearest to the peg wins the game. Zephyrus was so angry and jealous to see the two friends amusing themselves while he was blowing about all alone, that he determined to be revenged on both of them.

First of all the boy threw his quoit, and came very near to the peg indeed, so near that even Apollo, who could do everything better than anybody else, thought he should find it hard to beat him. The peg was a great way off, so Apollo took up the heaviest quoit, aimed perfectly straight, and sent it flying like a thunderbolt through the air.

But Zephyrus, who was waiting, gave a great blast, and blew Apollo's quoit as it was flying, so that it struck the boy, who fell to the ground.

It was a most cruel thing altogether. Apollo thought that he himself had struck his friend by aiming badly: the boy thought the same, for neither could tell that it was Zephyrus.

So perished Hyacinthus: nor could Apollo do anything to show his love and grief for his friend except to change him into a flower, which is called hyacinth to this day.

It is said that, if you look, you will find 'hya' written in Greek letters on every petal of the flower. Some people, however, say that it is not 'hya' at all, but 'aiai,' which means 'alas.' I don't know which is true; but if you will some day look at the petal of a hyacinth through a magnifying glass (the stronger the better, I should say), you will find out for yourself and be able to tell me.

Apollo seems to have been rather fond of turning his friends into trees and flowers. There was another friend of his named Cyparissus, who once, by accident, killed one of Apollo's favorite stags, and was so sorry for what he had done, and pined away so miserably, that the god, to put him out of his misery, changed him into a cypress tree. 'Cypress' comes from 'Cyparissus,' as you will easily see. And we still plant the cypress in churchyards, because it is the tree of tears and mourning that cannot be cured.

CHAPTER XI

APOLLO AND THE HELIOTROPE

THERE was a water nymph named Clytie, who was so beautiful that Apollo fell in love with her. She was proud and glad of being loved by the god of the sun, and loved him a great deal more than he loved her. But she believed that his love was as great as her own: and so she lived happily for a long time.

But one day, Apollo happened to see a king's daughter. He thought the young princess was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen: so he fell in love with her, and forgot Clytie as much as if there were nobody but his new love in the world. Clytie, however, knew nothing of all this, and only wondered why Apollo never came to see her any more.

Now the king kept his daughter strictly, and did not wish her to have anything to do with Apollo. I suppose he was afraid of Apollo's loving her for a time, and then leaving her to be miserable and unhappy, as happened to many nymphs and princesses in those days besides Clytie. So when he found that Apollo was making love to his daughter, he shut her up in his palace, and would not allow her to go out or anybody else to go in.

But Apollo was much too clever to be beaten in that way. He disguised himself as the mother of the young princess, and came to see her whenever he pleased. And so everything would have gone on just as he wished, if it had not been for Clytie, whom he had treated just as the king was afraid he would treat his daughter.

Clytie wondered why Apollo never came to see her, till she could bear it no longer; and she watched him, to find out what was the reason of it all. At last she saw somebody who looked like a queen go into the king's palace. But she knew Apollo much too well to be taken in by any disguise. She secretly followed him into the palace, and found him making love to the young princess.

In her misery and jealousy she went straight to the king, and told him what she had seen. Perhaps she hoped that the king would send his daughter away altogether, so that Apollo would then come back to her. She could not possibly foresee what would really happen.

The king was so enraged with his daughter for receiving Apollo's visits against his commands that he ordered her to be buried alive. Of course he could not punish Apollo: because Apollo was a god, while he was only a king.

Perhaps you will think that Apollo might have managed to save the young princess from such a terrible death as her father had ordered for her. Since he did not, I suppose that the king had her buried before anybody could tell the news; at any rate she was dead when Apollo arrived at her grave. All he could do for her was to show his love and his sorrow by turning her into a fragrant shrub, from which people take a sweet-smelling gum called myrrh.

Poor Clytie, whose jealousy had caused the death of the princess, he refused ever to speak to or look at again: and he turned her into the heliotrope, which has a perfume quite unlike that of the myrrh.

But in spite of his scorn and of everything he could do to her, Clytie loved him still: and though he would not look at her, she spent the livelong day in gazing up at him.

People say that the blossoms of the heliotrope always turn toward the sun: toward the east when he is rising, toward the west when he is setting, and straight up at noon, when he is in the middle of the sky. Of course, like other blossoms, they close at night, when he is no longer to be seen.

As for the sun himself, I suspect he has forgotten both Clytie and the young princess long ago, and sees no difference between them and any other trees or flowers.

CHAPTER XII

THE NARCISSUS

THIS story has nothing to do with Apollo: but I may as well tell it among the other stories of flowers.

There was a beautiful mountain nymph named Echo, who had never, in all her life, seen anybody less ugly-looking than the god Pan. You have read, in the first story about King Midas, that Pan was the chief of the satyrs, and you learned what hideous monsters they were. When Pan made love to Echo, she naturally kept him at a distance: and, as she supposed him to be no worse-looking than the rest of the world, she made up her mind to have nothing to do with love or love-making, and was quite content to ramble about the woods all alone.

But one day, to her surprise, she happened to meet a youth who was as different from Pan as any creature could be. Instead of having a goat's legs and long hairy arms, he was as graceful as Apollo himself: no horns grew out of his forehead, and his ears were not long, pointed, and covered with hair, but just like Echo's own. And he was just as beautiful in face as he was graceful in form. I doubt if Echo would have thought even Apollo himself so beautiful.

The nymphs were rather shy, and Echo was the very shyest of them all. But she admired the youth so much that she could not leave the spot, and at last she even plucked up courage enough to ask him, "What is the name of the most beautiful being in the whole world?"

"Whom do you mean?" he asked. "Yourself? If you want to know your own name, you can tell it better than I can."

"No," replied Echo, "I don't mean myself. I mean *you*. What is *your* name?"

"My name is Narcissus. But as for my being beautiful, that is absurd."

"Narcissus!" repeated Echo to herself. "It is a beautiful name. Which of the nymphs have you come to meet here in these woods all alone? She is lucky, whoever she may be."

"I have come to meet nobody," said Narcissus. "But—am I really so beautiful? I have often been told so by other girls, of course; but really it is more than I can quite believe."

"And you don't care for any of those girls?"

"Why, you see," said Narcissus, "when all the girls you know call you beautiful, there's no reason why you should care for one more than another. They all seem alike when they are always saying just the same thing. Ah! I do wish I could see myself, so that I could tell if it were really true. I would marry the girl who could give me the wish of my heart, to see myself as other people see me. But as nobody can make me do that, why, I suppose I shall get on without marrying anybody at all."

"What!" cried Echo, full of hope and joy; "if I make you see your own face, you will marry *me*?"

"I said so. And of course what I say I'll do, I'll do."

"Then come with me."

Echo took him by the hand and led him to the edge of a little lake in the wood.

"Kneel down, Narcissus," she said, "and bend your eyes over the water's edge. That lake is the mirror where the goddess Diana, sister of Apollo, comes every morning to dress her hair, and in which, every night, the moon and the stars behold themselves. Look into that water and see what manner of man you are."

Narcissus kneeled down and looked into the lake. And he beheld the reflected image of his own face. He looked, and looked, and could not take his eyes away.

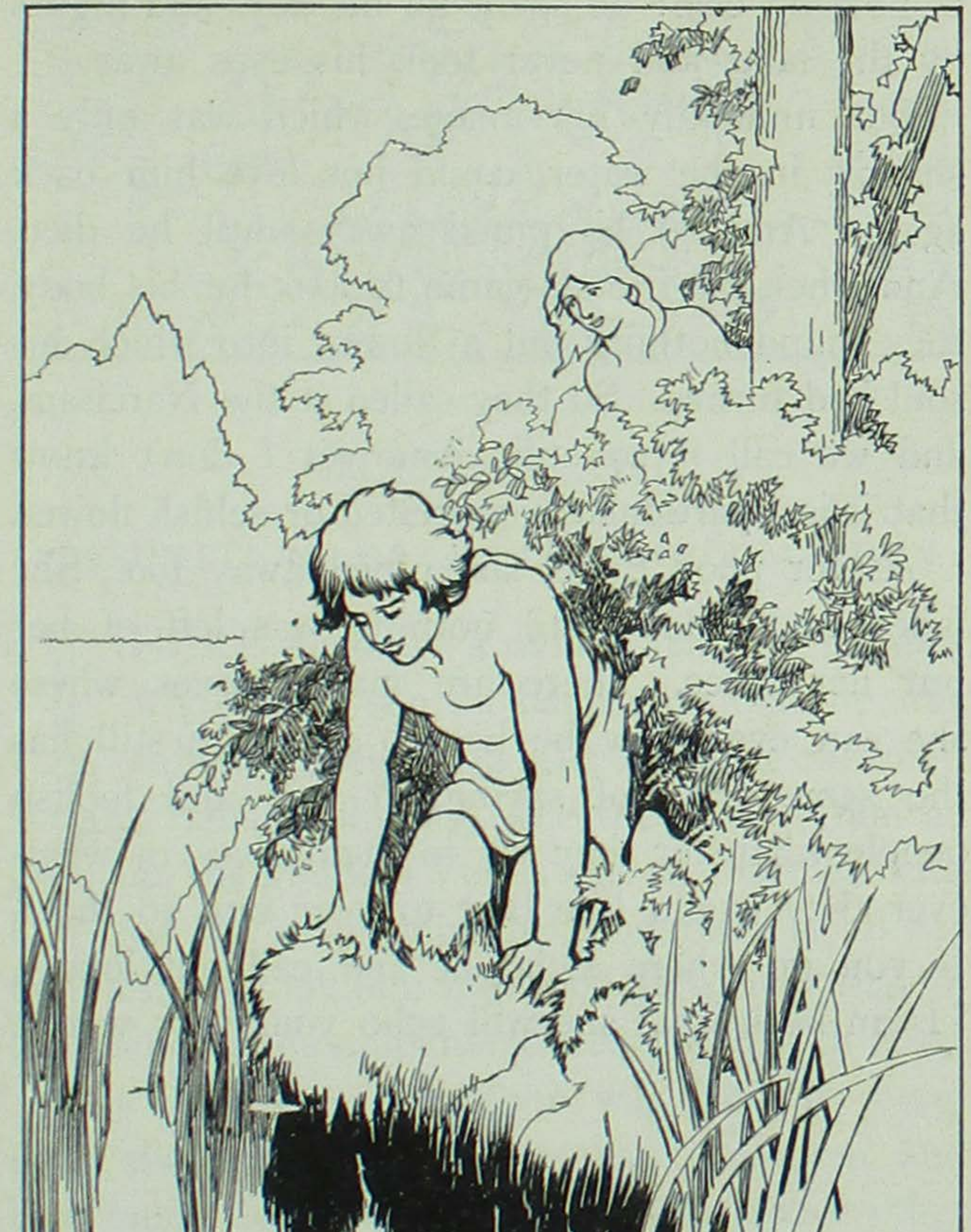
But Echo at last grew tired of waiting.

"Have you forgotten what you promised me?" she asked. "Are you content now? Do you see now that what I told you is true?"

He lifted his eyes at last, and exclaimed, "Oh, beautiful creature that I am! I am indeed the most divine creature in the whole wide world. I love myself madly. Go away. I want to be with my beautiful image, with myself, all alone. I can't marry you. I shall never love anybody but myself for the rest of my days."

And he gazed at himself once more, while poor Echo had to go weeping away.

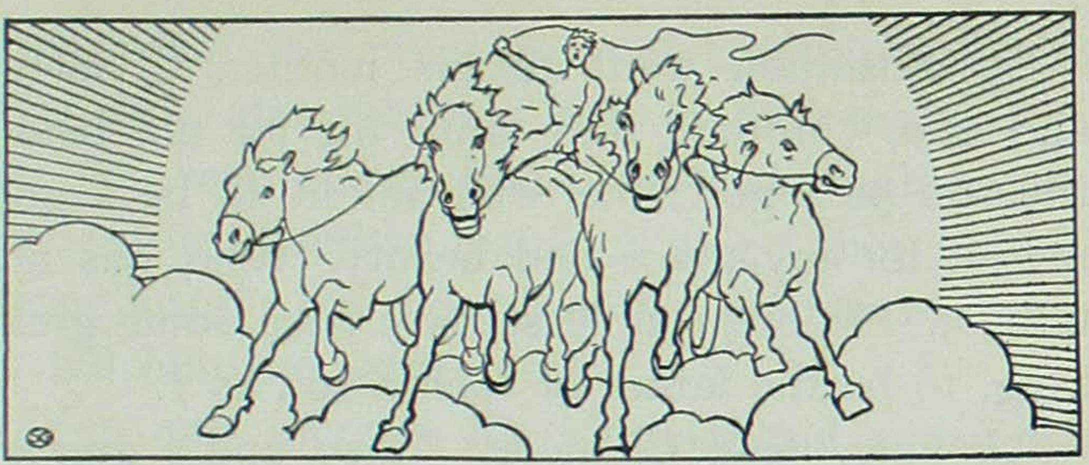
Narcissus had spoken truly. He loved himself and his own face so much that he could think



of nothing else: he spent all his days and nights by the lake, and never took his eyes away.

But unluckily his image, which was only a shadow in the water, could not love him back again. And so he pined away until he died. And when his friends came to look for his body, they found nothing but a flower, into which his soul had turned. So they called it the Narcissus, and we call it so still. And yet I don't know that it is a particularly conceited or selfish flower.

As for poor Echo, she pined away too. She faded and faded until nothing was left of her but her voice. There are many places where she can even now be heard. And she still has the same trick of saying to vain and foolish people whatever they say to themselves, or whatever they would like best to hear said to them. If you go where Echo is, and call out loudly, " I am beautiful," she will echo your very words.



CHAPTER XIII

PRESUMPTION; OR, APOLLO AND PHAËTHON

THERE was once a nymph named Clymene, who had a son so handsome that he was called Phaëthon, a Greek word meaning 'bright, radiant, shining,' like the sun. When he grew up, the goddess Venus was so charmed with him that she made him the chief ruler of all her temples, and took him into such high favor that all his friends and companions were filled with envy.

One day, when Phaëthon was foolishly bragging about his own beauty and greatness, and how much he was put by a goddess above other men, one of his companions answered him scornfully, "Ah! you may boast and brag, but you are a nobody after all. *My* father was Jupiter, as everybody knows; but who was yours?"

So Phaëthon went to his mother, Clymene, and said, "Mother, they taunt me for not being the son of a god; me, who am fit to be a god myself for my grace and beauty. Who was my father? He must at least have been some great king, to be the father of such a son as I."

"A king," said Clymene. "Aye, and a greater than all kings. Tell them, from me, that your father is Phœbus Apollo, the god of the sun."

But when he went back and told his friends, "My father is Phœbus Apollo, the god of the sun," they only scorned him and laughed at him the more.

"You 've caught your bragging from your mother," they said. "You 're *her* son, anyhow, whoever your father may be."

When Clymene heard this, she felt terribly offended. "Then I will prove my words," she said to Phaëthon. "Go to the palace of the sun and enter boldly. There you will see the sun god in all his glory. Demand of him to declare you to be his son openly before all the world, so that even the sons of Jupiter shall hang their heads for shame."

If Apollo had been still banished to earth, of course Phaëthon could have found him very easily. But the nine years of banishment were over now, and the only way to find the god of the sun was to seek him in his palace above the sky. How Phaëthon managed to get there I have never heard; but I suppose his mother was able to tell him the secret way.

You may imagine the glorious and wonderful place it was, the house of the sun, with the stars for the windows that are lighted up at night, and the clouds for curtains, and the blue sky for a garden, and the zodiac, that broad belt which seems to encircle the heavens, for a carriage drive. The sun itself, as you have heard, is the chariot of Apollo, drawn by four horses of white fire, who feed on golden grain, and are driven by the god himself round and round the world.

Phaëthon entered boldly, as his mother had told him, found Apollo in all his glory, and said, "My mother, Clymene, says that I am your son. Is it true?"

"Certainly," said Apollo, "what your mother has told you is true."

"Then give me a sign," said Phaëthon, "that all may know and believe. Make me sure that I am your son."

"Tell them that *I* say so," said Apollo. "There; don't hinder me any more. My horses are harnessed: it is time for the sun to rise."

"No," said Phaëthon, "they will only say that I brag and lie. Give me a sign for all the world to see, a sign that only a father would give to his own child."

"Very well," said Apollo, who was getting impatient at being so hindered. "Only tell me what you want me to do, and it shall be done."

"You swear it, by Styx?" said Phaëthon.

Now you must know that the Styx was a river in Hades, the world underground, by which the gods swore; and that an oath "by Styx" was as binding upon a god as a plain promise is upon a gentleman.

"I swear it, by Styx!" said Apollo, rather rashly, as you will see. But he was now in a great hurry indeed.

"Then," said Phaëthon, "let *me* drive the horses of the sun for one whole day."

This put Apollo in terrible alarm, for he knew very well that no hand, not even a god's, could drive the horses of the sun but his own. But he had sworn by Styx, the oath that cannot be broken. All he could do was to keep the world waiting for sunrise while he showed Phaëthon how to hold the reins and the whip, and pointed out what course to take, and warned him of the dangers of the road.

"But it 's all of no use. You 'll never do it," he added. "Give it up, while there is yet time. You know not what you do."

"Oh, but I do, though," said Phaëthon. "I know I can. There; I understand it all now, without another word."

So saying, he sprang into the chariot, seized the reins, and gave the four fiery horses four lashes that sent them flying like comets through the air.

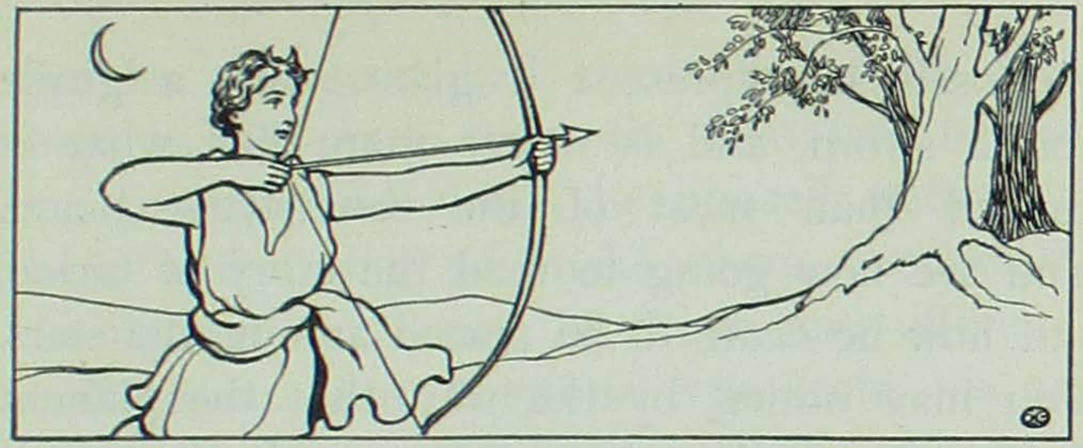
"Hold them in; hold them hard," cried Apollo.

But Phaëthon was gone, and too far off to hear.

Off indeed! and where? The world must have been amazed that day to see the sun rise like a rocket and go dashing about the sky, north, south, east, west, anywhere, nowhere, everywhere. Well the horses knew that it was not Apollo, their master, who plied the whip and held the reins. They took their bits between their teeth, and bolted. They kicked a planet to pieces (astronomers know where the pieces are still, and call them asteroids, or starlike bodies); they broke holes in the chariot, which we can see, and call "sun spots," to this day: it was as if chaos were come again.

At last Phaëthon, whose own head was reeling, saw to his horror that the horses, in their mad rush, were getting nearer and nearer to the earth itself: and what would happen then? If the wheels touched the globe we live on, it would be scorched to a cinder. Nearer, nearer, nearer it came, till a last wild kick broke the traces, overturned the sun itself, and Phaëthon fell, and fell, and fell, till he fell into the sea, and was drowned. And then the horses trotted quietly home.

The story of Phaëthon is always taken as a warning against being conceited and self-willed. But there are some curious things about it still to be told. The Greeks fancied that the great desert of Sahara, in Africa, is the place where the earth was scorched by the sun's chariot wheel, and that the African Negroes were burned black in the same way, and have never got white again. And the poplars are Phaëthon's sisters, who in mourning for his death wept themselves into trees.



CHAPTER XIV

DIANA AND ORION

YOU know that the fixed stars are divided into groups, called constellations. A name has been given to every constellation; and each is supposed to be like the shape of some creature or thing, such as the Great Bear, the Swan, the Cup, the Eagle, the Dragon, and so on.

Most of these names were given by the Greeks, who fancied they could see in them the shapes after which they were named. We have kept the old names, and still paint the supposed figure of each constellation on the celestial globe, which is the image, or map, of the sky.

Now the grandest, brightest, and largest of all the constellations is named Orion. It is supposed to represent a giant, with a girdle and a sword, and is rather more like what is fancied than most of the constellations are. You are now going to read the story of Orion, and how he came to be placed among the stars. You may notice, by the way, that the planets, the sun, and the moon are named after gods and goddesses; the fixed stars, after mortals who were raised to the skies.

There was once a poor farmer in Greece, who loved his wife so much, and was so overcome with grief at her death, that he vowed never to marry again. But she left him no children. And when, in course of time, he grew old, he sadly felt the want of sons and daughters to make his old age less hard and lonely.

One day it happened that Jupiter, Neptune, and Mercury (who was one of the gods, and Jupiter's chief minister and messenger) were on a visit to earth. The night fell, and they grew tired and hungry. So they wandered on to find rest and food; and, as luck would have it, they came to the cottage of the old farmer, and asked for shelter.

The farmer thought they were only three poor benighted travelers who had lost their way.

But he was good and charitable, so he asked them in and gave them the best fare he had, bread, roots, and drink, he himself waiting on them, and trying to make them comfortable. He poured out a cup of drink, and offered it to Neptune. But Neptune rose from his seat and gave the cup to Jupiter, like a subject to a king who should be first served.

You may not think there was much to notice in this; but the farmer observed it, and then, looking intently on the stranger to whom Neptune had given the cup, he was struck by a sudden religious awe that told him he was in the presence of the king and father of gods and men.

He straightway fell on his knees and cried, "I am poor and humble; but I have in my stall one ox to plow my field. I will gladly offer him up as a sacrifice for joy that Jupiter has thought me worthy to give him food and drink."

"You are a good and pious man," said Jupiter. "Ask of us any gift you please, and it shall be yours."

"My wife is dead," replied the old man, "and I have vowed never to marry again. But let me have a child."

"Take the ox," said Jupiter, "and sacrifice him."

So the old man, being full of faith, sacrificed his ox, and, at the bidding of Jupiter, buried the skin. And from that skin, and out of the ground, there grew a child, who was named Orion.

Orion grew and grew till he became a giant, of wonderful strength and splendid beauty. He took the most loving care of his aged father, and was the best of sons to him.

But when the old man died, Orion went out into the world to seek his fortune. And the first service he found was that of Diana, the sister of Apollo, and queen and goddess of the moon.

Diana, however, had a great deal to do besides looking after the moon. She was three goddesses in one, a goddess of the sky, a goddess of earth, and a goddess of Hades, or the underworld, besides. In heaven she was called Luna, whose task was to light the world when Apollo was off duty. In Hades she was called Hecate, who, with her scepter, ruled the ghosts of dead souls. And on earth her name was Diana, the queen of forests and mountains, of wild animals and hunters.

She wore a crescent on her forehead and a quiver at her back; her limbs were bare, and she held a bow, with which she shot as well as her brother Apollo. Just as he was called Phœbus, so she was often called Phœbe. She went hunting all night among the hills and woods, attended by nymphs, of whom she was queen.

There are not so many stories about her as about the other gods and goddesses, and yet she is really the most interesting of them all, as you will see some day.

This great strange goddess had sworn never to love or marry, had sworn it by Styx, I suppose. But Orion was so beautiful and so strong and so great a hunter that she came as near to loving him as she ever did to loving anybody. She had him always with her, and could never bear to have him leave her.

But Orion never thought of becoming the husband of a goddess, and he fell in love with a mortal, the daughter of the king of Chios, an island in the Ægean Sea.

When, however, he asked the king for the princess, the king was terribly frightened at the idea of having a giant for his son-in-law.

But he dared not say no. He answered him, "My kingdom is overrun with terrible wild beasts. I will give my daughter to the man who kills them all."

He said this, feeling sure that any man who tried to kill all the wild beasts in the island would himself be killed.

But Orion went out, and killed all the wild beasts in no time, with his club and his sword.

Then the king was still more afraid of him, and said, "You have won my daughter. But, before you marry her, let us drink together, in honor of this joyful day."

Orion, thinking no harm, went with him to the seashore, where they sat down and drank together. But before long Orion fell asleep with the strong drink which the king had invented; and when he was sound asleep, his treacherous companion put out both his eyes.

The giant awoke to find himself blind, and did not know what to do or which way to go. But at last, in the midst of his despair, he heard the sound of a blacksmith's forge. Guided by the clang, he reached the place, and prayed the blacksmith to climb up on his shoulders, and so lend him his eyes to guide him.

The blacksmith consented, and seated himself on the giant's shoulder.

Then said Orion, "Guide me to the place where I can see the first sunbeam that rises at daybreak in the east over the sea."

Orion strode out, and the blacksmith guided him, and at last they came to the place where the earliest sunbeam first strikes on human eyes. It struck on Orion's, and gave him back his sight again. Then, thanking the blacksmith, he plunged into the sea, to swim back to the goddess Diana.

Now Apollo had long noticed his sister's affection for Orion, and feared that she would break her vow against love and marriage. To break an oath would be a horrible thing for a goddess to do. While Orion was away, making love and killing wild beasts in the island of Chios, there was no danger; but now he was coming back, there was no knowing what might happen.

So he thought of a trick to get rid of Orion. He stood with her on the seashore, and said, "My sister, some people say that you can shoot as well as I can. Now, of course, that is absurd."

"Why absurd?" asked Diana. "I can shoot quite as well as you."

"We will soon see that," said Apollo. Observe that dark speck far out there, floating in the water. I wager that you can't hit it, and that I can."

"We *will* see," said Diana.

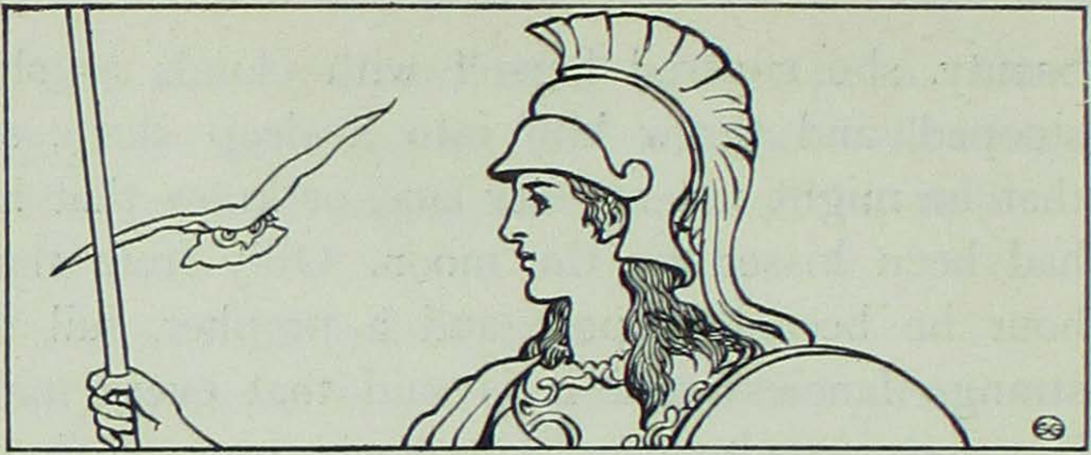
So she drew her bow and shot her arrow at the little dark object, which seemed dancing on the waves miles and miles away. To hit it seemed impossible. But Diana's arrow went true. The speck was hit; it sank, and rose no more.

It was the head of Orion, who was swimming back to Diana. She had been tricked into killing him with an arrow from her own bow. All she could do now was to place him among the stars, where he still is.

So her vow was kept; and from that time she never allowed herself to be seen by a man. Women might see her; but if men saw her, they went mad or died.

There is a terrible story of a hunter named Actæon, who once happened to catch a glimpse of her as she was bathing in a pool. She instantly turned him into a stag, so that his own dogs fell upon him and killed him.

And another time, when she saw a shepherd and could not help wishing to kiss him for his beauty, she covered herself with clouds as she stooped, and threw him into a deep sleep, so that he might not see her face, or know that he had been kissed by the moon. Only from that hour he became a poet and a prophet, full of strange fancies; and it is said that every man becomes a madman or a poet who goes to sleep in the moonlight on the top of a hill. Diana comes and kisses him in his dreams.



CHAPTER XV

MINERVA, THE GODDESS OF WISDOM

ONE day Jupiter had a bad headache. He had never had one before, so he did not know what it was or what to do. One god recommended one thing, and another proposed another, and Jupiter tried them all; but the more things he tried, the worse the headache grew.

At last he said, "I can't stand this any more. Vulcan, bring your sledge hammer and split open my skull. Kill or cure."

Vulcan brought his hammer and burst Jupiter's skull with a single blow. And out there came a fine, full-grown goddess, clad in complete armor from head to foot, armed with a spear and shield, and having beautiful large blue eyes. She was

Minerva (or, as the Greeks called her, Athena), the wisdom that comes from Jupiter's brain, and makes it ache sometimes.

Minerva was wonderfully good as well as wonderfully wise: not that there is much difference between goodness and wisdom. She was the only goddess, or god either, who never did a foolish, an unkind, or a wrong thing.

By the way, though, she once took it into her head that she could play the flute, and the gods laughed at her; but when she looked into a brook and saw what ugly faces she made when she played, she knew at once why the gods laughed. She laughed at herself, threw the flute away, and never played it again; so she was even wise enough not to be vain, or to think she could do well what she did badly.

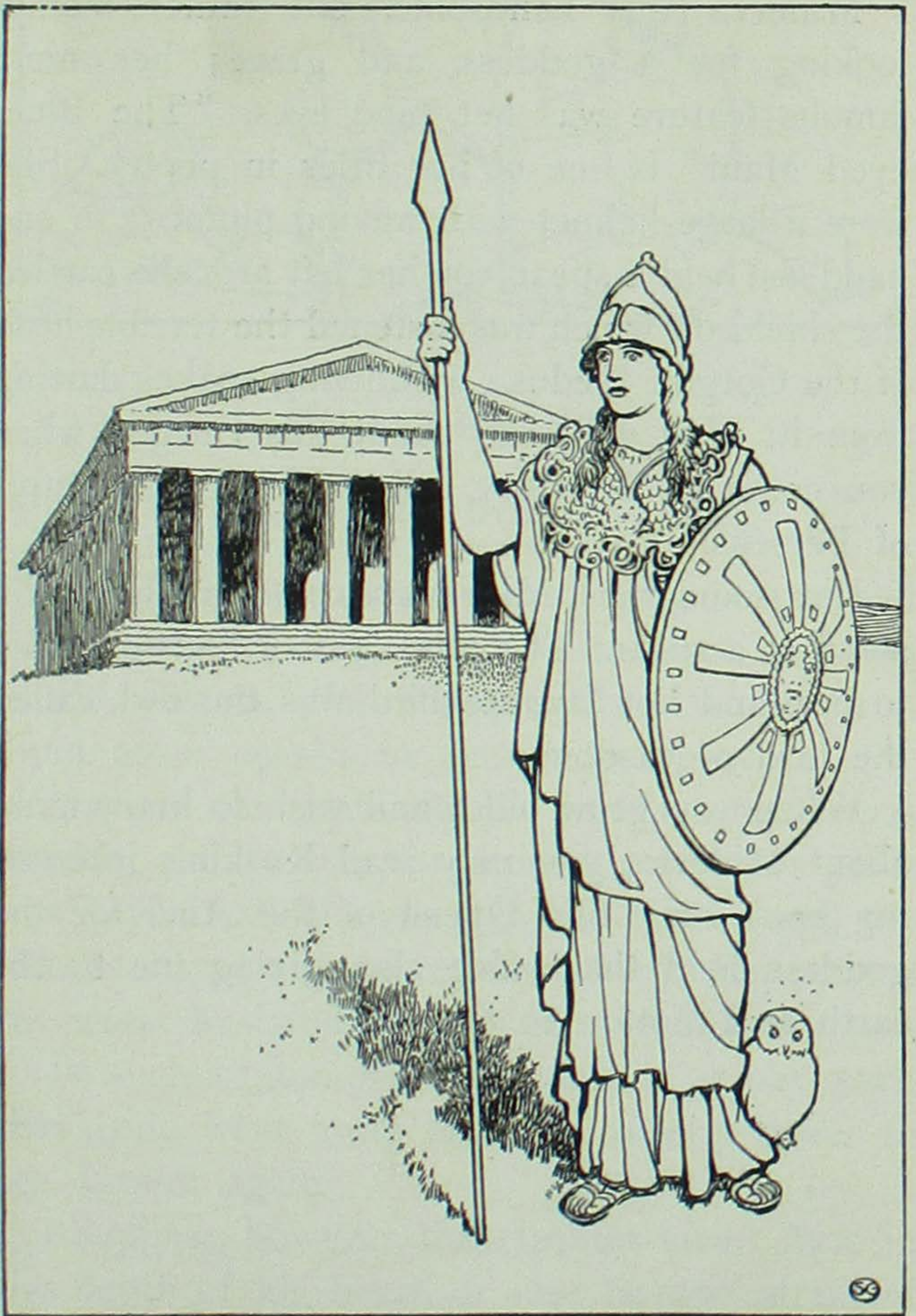
The only bad thing about good people is that there are so few good stories to tell of them. Minerva was Jupiter's favorite daughter, and no wonder; and she was the only one of all the gods and goddesses whom he allowed to use his thunder. She was the only one he could trust, I suppose. She was rather too fond of fighting, considering that she was a lady, but she was as good at her needle as at her sword.

She was so good at spinning that a woman who was the best spinner and seamstress in the world hanged herself in despair because she could not spin a web so neatly and finely as Minerva. The goddess turned her into a spider, who is still the finest spinner in the world, next to Minerva alone.

Once the people of Attica, the chief state of Greece, wanted a name for their capital, which they had just been building. They asked the gods, and the gods in council decreed that the new city should be named by the god who should give the most useful new present to mankind.

Neptune struck the earth with his trident, or three-pronged spear, and out sprang the horse; and nobody thought that his gift could be beaten. But Minerva planted the olive, which is the plant of peace.

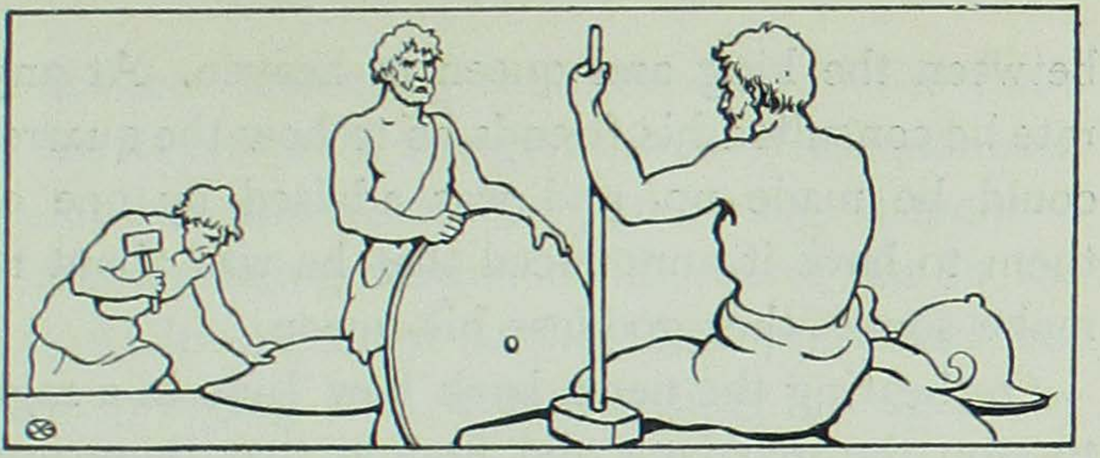
So the gods gave the honor of naming the new city to Minerva, because the emblem of peace is better than the horse, the emblem of war. She named the city Athenæ, from her own Greek name, Athena, and it is called Athens to this day. The Athenians always paid their chief worship to their goddess godmother.



Minerva was handsome, but rather manly-looking for a goddess, and grave; her most famous feature was her blue eyes. "The Blue-eyed Maid" is one of her titles in poetry. She wore a large helmet with waving plumes; in one hand she held a spear; on her left arm she carried the shield on which was fastened the terrible head of the Gorgon Medusa, with living snakes darting from it. You will read about this Gorgon when you come to the story called "The Adventures of Perseus."

But sometimes Minerva carried a distaff instead of a spear. The olive was of course sacred to her, and her favorite bird was the owl, called the bird of wisdom.

When you grow older and wish to know more about Minerva, you may read Ruskin's interesting book on "The Queen of the Air," for the goddess held that office also, giving life to the earth and motion to the sea.



CHAPTER XVI

VULCAN, THE GOD OF FIRE

YOU may remember reading, at the end of the story called "The Gods and the Giants," that the quarrels of Jupiter and Juno never ceased to disturb the peace of the sky where the gods dwell. Juno's temper was terrible, and so was her jealousy; and her pride was beyond all bounds. On the other hand, her character was without reproach, while Jupiter was the worst husband in the whole of heaven.

To such a pitch did their quarrels at last reach that Juno went away to earth, vowing never to see Jupiter again.

I suppose, however, that Jupiter loved Juno in the depth of his heart, or else he was afraid of the scandal that would follow upon a separation between the king and queen of heaven. At any rate he consulted his friends as to how the quarrel could be made up, and was advised by one of them to have it announced that he was about to make some other goddess his queen.

On hearing the news, back flew Juno in a rage to stop the marriage, and finding that there was no marriage to stop, consented to remain in the sky, and to forgive her husband once more.

But to quarrel once always makes it easier and easier to quarrel again, and harder and harder to keep love or friendship alive. And before long came another quarrel, the worst of all.

Juno scolded furiously, and Jupiter at last said, "Enough. You shall destroy the peace of heaven no longer. Out you shall go."

"All the better," said Juno. "I will go back to earth, as I did before. And I am not going to be tricked by your false stories a second time."

"No," said Jupiter; "the happiness of the earth is as dear to me as the happiness of the sky. You shall neither go to earth nor stay in heaven."

Taking a long golden chain, he fastened it round her, under her shoulders. Then he sent for one of the Cyclopes' anvils, and fastened it to her feet. Securing the other end of the chain to the keystone of the great arch of the rainbow, he let her down, so that Juno hung suspended in mid-air, being neither on the earth nor in the sky, while the anvil at her feet prevented her from swinging and from climbing up again by the chain.

It was a terrible position for Juno. Her anger was still at full heat, and such a degradation, in sight of gods and men, was a heavy wound to her pride, not to speak of the bodily pain which she had helplessly to bear. But she scorned to beg for pardon. So there she hung, plotting revenge, until night came, when Apollo was asleep, and Diana was away hunting, and Jupiter, making the most of his long-lost quiet, was dozing on his throne.

Then Juno, who certainly could not sleep with an anvil dragging at her legs and a chain at her shoulders, heard a whisper from above: " Hush! Don't start, don't scream; keep quite still, and I 'll soon draw you up again."

Not that Juno had thought of starting or screaming; she was much too dignified. Besides, the whisper, though rather rough and hoarse, was pleasant to hear just then. For she recognized the voice of Vulcan, her own son, and she knew that he was going to help her.

So she kept perfectly quiet, as she was bidden, and presently she felt herself, anvil and all, being drawn slowly upward. It must have been rather painful being dragged up while the anvil dragged her down; but she found herself on firm sky at last, and sighed with relief when Vulcan, whipping out his knife, cut the cord at her feet, and let the anvil go thundering down upon the earth below.

You can fancy what a clatter it made. People started out of their sleep — not that that mattered. But it did matter that Jupiter started out of his. He sprang from his throne, and saw at once what had happened. The next moment, with a tremendous kick, he sent Vulcan flying after the anvil.

Vulcan fell and fell, spinning through space, till he lost his senses, and then —

The anvil had fallen upon the island of Lemnos, and the islanders, rushing out of their houses to see what the crash and clatter could be about, were amazed to see what looked like a confused bundle of legs and arms tumbling and whirling through the air. As it came nearer, it seemed to be a human figure. So the people made a sort of network of their arms, to catch it and prevent its being dashed to pieces.

And lucky it was for Vulcan that they did. For when he came to himself he found himself with nothing worse the matter than one leg badly broken.

Although he was a god, he always remained lame, and he was naturally somewhat deformed. But neither lameness nor deformity prevented his having amazing strength; and he was as clever as he was strong.

The people of Lemnos treated him kindly, and he in return taught them to work in metals. They built him a palace, and he set up forges and furnaces, and made all sorts of useful and curious things. He used to work at the forges himself, blowing the fires and wielding the hammer. Among the curious things he made were two mechanical statues, which seemed alive, walked about with him, and even helped him in his work.

And at last there came into his head a plan for getting called back into heaven. So he shut himself up in his smithy with his two mechanical workmen, and let nobody know what he was doing there. Those mechanical workmen were among the most useful things he made, for he could trust them to help him in his most secret work without understanding it or being able to tell how it was done.

One day the gods up in heaven were excited by the arrival of a splendid golden throne, a present from the earth for Jupiter. How it came there nobody knew. But there it was, and all agreed that nothing so magnificent in its way had ever been seen before, even in the skies. Jupiter was about to try how it felt to sit on, when Juno, jealous even of that, went quickly before him and seated herself.

"Ah! that *is* a comfortable throne," she exclaimed. "There is nothing like gold to sit on, after all."

Jupiter was annoyed with Juno's behavior, as indeed he was with most things she did. However, he did not like to make another scene before all the gods and goddesses, and waited patiently for her to get up again. But she did not move.

At last, "I think that is *my* throne," he hinted, in a tone which seemed gentle, but which Juno understood exceedingly well. Still she did not move.

"Thrones are not meant to go to sleep on," he said in a yet more meaning way.

And still she did not move.

"Get up," he thundered at last, his patience gone.

"I can't," was all she could say, as she made a vain effort to rise. "The throne is holding me with its arms."

And so it proved. Juno was held so tightly by the throne that she could scarcely struggle. It was very strange. And presently it became stranger still. Neither the authority of Jupiter, nor all the strength and skill of all Olympus together, could loosen the clutch of the magic throne.

"Ah!" said Mercury, who, you may remember, was Jupiter's chief messenger, and the quickest and cleverest of all the gods; "if only Vulcan were here! He understands these things."

"And why is he not here?" asked Jupiter, sternly.

But nobody dared answer, though everybody knew. However, Mercury took the hint, vanished for an instant or two, and, while the gods were vainly tugging at the arms of the throne, reappeared, followed by a limping figure all black and hot from the forge; in short, by Vulcan.

"What is the matter?" asked Vulcan, as innocently as if he had nothing to do with it at all. "Ah! I see. A clever invention; but — well, I can't afford another broken leg: so if I help my mother *this* time — "

Seeing from the face of Jupiter that he had nothing to fear, he pressed the tip of his grimy finger on a secret spring: the arms instantly opened, and Juno was free.

What they did with the throne I cannot tell you; but you may be certain that nobody ever sat on it again.

After that Vulcan remained among the gods as the god of fire, and was the chief blacksmith of nature. He opened vast forges in the middle of the earth, where he made weapons and armor for gods and heroes, and thunderbolts for Jupiter. The Cyclopes, the giants with one eye in the middle of their foreheads, were his workmen.

The chimneys of his furnaces are called volcanoes, of which the chief is Mount Ætna, in the island of Sicily; and you can tell when some great work is going on by the smoke and flame that bursts out of these. 'Volcano,' you will no doubt notice, is nearly the same word as 'Vulcan.'

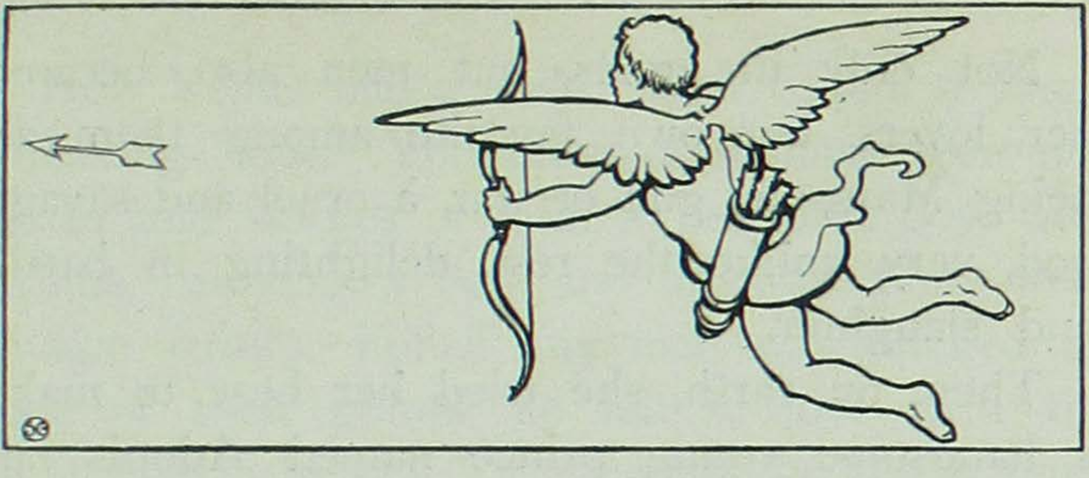
And so things went on quietly till one day a wonderful thing happened. Nobody has ever been able to account for it or understand it; so I must just tell you the story as it stands.

One lovely spring morning there was scarcely the softest breeze to stir the sea, which lay shining like a mirror in the sun. All at once some people on the shore of the island of Cyprus saw a light amber-colored froth floating on the ripples. It gathered into a delicate rosy cloud, and presently began to tremble as if it were trying to be alive. It still rested lightly on the water, so lightly that the breeze, soft and gentle as it was, might have blown it away; but its delicate trembling carried it upward till at last it seemed to breathe, then to take shape, and at last blossomed into the most beautiful woman (if woman it was) that had ever been seen in the world, or even in heaven.

With wonderful grace she glided to the shore. Poets have told how the zephyrs, or soft west winds, guided her as she came, and the four seasons received her on the shore. The people of Cyprus could only look at her and wonder and worship.

And this was the birth of the great goddess Venus, the queen of love, whom the Greeks called Aphrodite, a name which means 'born of the foam of the sea.'

And this wonderful goddess of love and beauty Jupiter chose to give in marriage to Vulcan, the deformed and limping god of fire.



CHAPTER XVII

LOVE AND THE SOUL; OR, CUPID AND PSYCHE

THE fact was, that Jupiter himself had fallen in love with the beautiful new goddess. But she would have nothing to say to him: and so, just out of anger and revenge, he ordered her to marry Vulcan, because he was ugly, deformed, and always black with working at his forges.

Altogether it was an unlucky day when Venus came into the sky. Her beauty turned the heads of the gods, and filled the goddesses with envy and jealousy. But all that mattered nothing to her, for she had a magic zone, or girdle: and whenever she put it on, she became so irresistibly charming that everybody forgave her everything.

Not only the gods, but men also, became her lovers, her own favorite among them all being Mars, the god of war, a cruel and savage god, very unlike the rest, delighting in battle and slaughter.

Then, on earth, she tried her best to make a handsome young prince named Adonis fall in love with her.

But he, strange to say, cared nothing for her. The only thing he liked in the world was hunting: he scorned everything else, Venus included.

Still, in spite of his scorn for her, she mourned for him miserably when he was killed by a wild boar. She changed him into the flower called Anemone, so that she might still find him on earth: though some people say her grief was such that Death took pity on her, and allowed him to come to life again for six months at a time every year.

This might mean that Adonis is only another name for the beauty of the earth, which comes to life for the six months of spring and summer, and dies for the six months of autumn and winter. For most of these stories have some sort of meaning.

Now Venus had a child called Cupid, a name meaning 'love.' You must often have seen pictures and statues of him, a beautiful boy, with wings, carrying a bow and arrows. They were magic arrows. For if any man was pricked by one of their points, he fell in love with the first woman he saw: or a woman, in like manner, with the first man.

And as Cupid was exceedingly mischievous, and fond of aiming his arrows at people for his own amusement, the wrong women were always falling in love with the wrong men, and the wrong men with the wrong women: and so a great deal of fresh trouble came into the world, as if there had not been enough before, without the mischievous tricks of Cupid.

Sometimes he went about blindfolded, shooting his arrows about at random: and then, of course, the confusion was worse than ever. It has been said that the bandage over his eyes means that love is blind to faults. But he does not always wear the bandage; and when he does, I believe it is only when he does not choose to see.

Now in a certain city there lived a king and queen, who had three beautiful daughters. The name of the youngest was Psyche, and she was the most beautiful of all. So beautiful and so charming was she that the people worshiped her as a goddess, instead of Venus. This made Venus very angry indeed, that a mortal girl should receive the honor and worship due to the goddess of beauty.

So, in her jealous wrath, she spoke to Cupid: "Do you see that girl yonder? I bid you, as your mother, to make her fall in love with the meanest of mankind, one so degraded that he cannot find his equal in wretchedness throughout the whole wide world."

Psyche's elder sisters were both married to kings; but she herself was so marvelously beautiful that no mere mortal dared to ask for her in marriage. This distressed the king, her father, greatly: for it was thought dishonorable for a princess not to marry. So he consulted the oracle of Apollo, an oracle being a place where a god's voice answered questions.

And the voice answered him thus:

"On a cliff the maiden place,
Deck her as you deck the dead:
None that is of mortal race
Shall so fair a maiden wed.

"But a being dread and dire,
Feared by earth, by heaven abhorred,
Breathing venom, sword, and fire,
He shall be the lady's lord."

This answer made the king more unhappy than ever, at the thought of having to give his favorite daughter to be devoured by some terrible monster. However, the oracle had to be obeyed, and the whole city gave itself up to mourning for many days.

Then at last a funeral procession set out to conduct the poor princess to her doom. Her father and mother were distracted with grief. Psyche alone showed cheerfulness and courage, doing all she could to comfort them in their great distress, and to make them resigned to the will of Heaven.

When the procession reached the highest peak of a neighboring mountain, it returned to the city, and Psyche was left there all alone.

Then her courage left her, and she threw herself upon the rock all trembling and weeping. But suddenly, in the midst of her distress, she was gently lifted up by the wind, and as gently let down upon the soft turf of a secret valley in the very heart of the hill.

It was a delightful place, and Psyche fell pleasantly asleep. When she woke she saw a grove, with a fountain of water as clear as crystal, and near the fountain was a splendid palace, built of gold, cedar, and ivory, and paved with precious stones.

Psyche approached it timidly, and presently found courage to enter. The beauty of the chambers lured her on and on, until at last she was fairly bewildered with admiration. All the wealth and beauty of the world seemed collected in this wonderful palace, and all without a lock or a chain to guard them.

Suddenly, in the midst of her wonder, she heard a musical voice, which addressed her:

"Lady, wonder not nor fear;
All is thine thou findest here.
On yon couch let slumber bless thee,
Hands unseen shall bathe and dress thee,
Bring thee meat and pour thee wine:
Thine are we, and all is thine."

She looked round, but saw nobody. However, she saw the couch, and, being tired with wandering about the palace and seeing so many wonders, lay down on it and soon fell into a sweet sleep.

When quite rested, she rose and took a bath, being waited upon by invisible hands. Then she saw dishes of all sorts of dainties, and cups of drink, carried apparently without hands to a table, at which, being by this time exceedingly hungry, she sat down and made a delicious meal, attended by voices for servants.

When she had finished eating, another voice sang to an invisible harp, and this performance was followed by a full chorus of such music as is only heard in heaven. And so at last the darkness of night came on.

Then she heard a voice, different from all the rest, whisper close in her ear: "I am your husband, Psyche, of whom the oracle foretold. This my palace, with all its delight, is yours, and I shall make you very happy. But you must obey me in two things. You must never see your father or your mother or your sisters again, and you must never seek to see me at all. If you promise this, I swear to you that no harm shall befall your kindred, and that you shall be happy forever."

The whisper was strangely sweet and gentle for a terrible monster's. Indeed, it was so loving and so tender that she forgot even to tremble. It went to her heart, and she could only whisper back, " I promise you."

Thenceforth Psyche lived in the palace, every day bringing her fresh surprises and pleasures, the voices keeping her company, and delighting her with their marvelous music. And as soon as it became too dark for her to see him, the lord of the palace, her husband, came to her and stayed with her till nearly daybreak, until at last she forgot everything except how good he was to her, and how much she had learned to love him. It did not even trouble her that she had never seen him, for she thought of nothing but pleasing him and obeying his commands.

But one day Psyche's sisters, having heard of her fate, and having come all the way from their husbands' kingdoms to learn about it, climbed together to the top of the mountain to see if they could find any traces of her.

Finding none, they wept and beat their breasts till the rocks resounded with their cries. Nay, their lamentations reached the palace itself; and Psyche, who loved her sisters, ran, forgetful of her promise, to the foot of the mountain, whence she saw them above, mourning for her in an agony of woe.

The sight of their grief was too much for Psyche: it seemed so cruel that her sisters should mourn for her as dead while all the time she was alive and happy. Surely the husband who loved her so much did not mean the promise to prevent her from putting their hearts at ease. So she gave a command, and forthwith the invisible hands lifted her sisters, and carried them down safely into the secret valley.

Imagine their surprise. But imagine it still more when their lost sister, after embracing them, led them into her palace, showed them her treasures, entertained them with invisible concerts, and feasted them sumptuously.

" And the lord, your husband," asked the eldest sister at last, " what manner of man may he be? And does he use you well and make you happy?"

The sudden question took Psyche aback. It seemed so strange to have to answer that she had never seen the face of her husband, and that she knew no more what he was like than they.

So, to avert their curiosity, she said, " He is an excellent husband and makes me happy indeed, a handsome young man, who has not yet grown a beard: he spends his days in hunting among the mountains, or no doubt you would have seen him. But it is time for us to part, my sisters, or it will be dark before you get home."

So, loading them with jewels and golden ornaments, she embraced them, and, calling the invisible hands, had them conveyed safely back to the top of the mountain.

Whether the sisters had been honest in their mourning for Psyche I cannot tell: though I think they made more noise about it than people make who really and truly grieve. Anyhow, they were now filled with envy of Psyche's wealth and happiness.

"To think of my being married to a bald, miserly old man," said the eldest sister on their way home, "while that minx has a handsome young husband who squanders untold wealth on her! And how proud she has grown! Why, she spoke to us as if we were her slaves."

"And to think," said the second sister, "of my being married to a gouty cripple! You may take things patiently, sister, and put up with her airs: but not I. I propose that we hit on some plan to take down her pride."

So they hid the presents that Psyche had given them, redoubled their cries and groans, told their father and mother that Psyche had certainly been devoured, and returned to their own kingdoms for a while.

But only for a while. Having arranged a plan, they returned to the top of the mountain: and in such a hurry were they to revisit Psyche that they leapt into the valley and would have come down with broken necks had not a passing breeze, who recognized them as Psyche's sisters, caught them and made their fall easy.

Psyche could not help being glad to see them again, for she loved them dearly, and, in spite of her happiness, hungered for news from home.

After she had entertained them as before, "By the way," asked the eldest sister, "the lord, your husband, what manner of man is he? You told us; but I have forgotten."

And so had poor Psyche forgotten what she had told them. So she said this time, "He is a middle-aged man, with a big beard, and a few gray hairs sprinkled here and there. He is a merchant, and travels into distant countries, or no doubt he would have been here to give you welcome."

"Oh, you poor innocent!" exclaimed her sister. "As if he could be young and middle-aged, bearded and beardless, a merchant and a hunter! It's plain you've never seen that husband of yours, and no wonder he would n't let you. For *we* have, we, who spend our lives in watching over your interests," she went on, squeezing out a hypocritical tear. "Your husband is an enormous dragon, with many folds and coils, a neck swollen with poison, and huge gaping jaws. Think of the oracle, you poor, dear, deluded girl. He is only feeding you up with delicacies to eat you. Well, if you like the prospect, *we* have done *our* duty. And when you are eaten up, you won't be able to say *we* did n't tell you so."

Psyche was aghast with dismay. She trusted her sisters: but there was the oracle; and it was certainly mysterious that her husband had never allowed her to look upon him.

"Oh! what *shall* I do?" she cried.

"Do? Why, there's only one thing to do. We have thought it all out for you. Here is a lamp. Light it and hide it under a piece of tapestry. When the monster sleeps, uncover the lamp, and throw the light full upon him. Then take this knife, which has been well sharpened, and sever his head from his body. Thus the world will be freed from a curse, and you will be saved."

Thereupon they left her. And how shall Psyche's feelings be described? Was it possible she was the wife of a horrible dragon? Promise or no promise, that she must know. So she hid the lighted lamp, as directed. The night came, and her husband with it. When he had fallen into a deep sleep, Psyche, with naked feet, crept noiselessly across the floor, drew off the tapestry, and flooded the room with light, and she saw —

A dragon? No — Cupid himself, asleep in all his beauty, with folded wings, and his bow and arrows by his side.

She hung over him in love and wonder. Alas! a drop of oil from the lamp fell upon him, and scalded his shoulder. He woke, cast a look of reproach and sorrow upon poor faithless Psyche, seized his bow and arrows, spread his wings, and flew.

She, overwhelmed with penitence for her disobedience and distrust, and desperate at the thought of losing him, clung with both hands to one of his feet, and was thus carried through the window and far away through the night till her strength failed her and she fell fainting to the ground.

When she came to her senses, she found herself on the bank of a river, and, in her despair, threw herself into the stream. But the river took pity on her, and carried her into a bed of reeds, to whom the god Pan was giving a music lesson.

Pan told her how foolish she was to think she could mend matters by killing herself, and advised patience, which was none the worse counsel for being easy to preach and difficult to follow. However, he was very kind, so she thanked him, and wandered out into the world, hoping that she might meet Cupid some day, and beg him to forgive her.

Meanwhile Cupid lay tossing and groaning in his bed in his mother's palace, for his scalded shoulder gave him great pain.

Venus wondered what could possibly have happened, for all her questioning could get nothing from him but moans. And maybe she would never have known, had not a gull come to her with a whole budget of scandal: among the rest, how Cupid was carrying on a love affair with a mortal.

And when the gull told her that the girl's name was said to be Psyche, the rage of the goddess knew no bounds. She hurried to Cupid's bedside, and gave him such a scolding that he must have forgotten the pain of the scald.

Then she went, still storming, to Juno, and demanded the instant arrest and punishment of Psyche. From Juno she went to Jupiter himself, who put Mercury at her service.

Mercury received from her a little book in which was written the name and description of Psyche, and with this he went about the world, proclaiming that whoever should seize a certain princess of that name, an escaped handmaid of Venus, should receive seven kisses from the goddess herself for a reward.

Knowing nothing of all this, Psyche wandered on and on till she saw a temple on the top of a mountain. She thought it might be the dwelling of Cupid, so she climbed up to it, and found it littered with sheaves of corn, bound and unbound, scythes, sickles, and such things, all lying about in confusion.

Shocked at finding a temple in such a state, she set to work to put everything in order. She was in the middle of her work, when a beautiful lady appeared before her, crowned with a wreath of ears of wheat, whom she knew to be Ceres, the goddess of harvest.

"Who are you," asked the goddess, graciously, "who work so hard to put the floor of my house in order?"

"Psyche," she said; "and I implore you, great goddess, to grant me shelter for a few days. I will serve you faithfully and well."

But when the goddess heard the name of Psyche, her face changed. "Willingly would I shelter you, but I dare not shelter one whom the wrath of Venus is following through earth and air. Begone! and be thankful that I do not keep you as a prisoner. Not even I dare offend Venus. My poor girl! I am sorry for you. But begone!"

Turned away by the kindest of all the goddesses, Psyche wandered on and on till she came to another temple in a gloomy valley, which proved to be the temple of Juno, to whom Psyche, falling on her knees before the altar, prayed for succor.

But Juno, appearing to her, said, "Willingly would I help you; but though I am the queen of heaven, I must obey the law. Venus claims you as her handmaid, and nobody may give protection to a fugitive slave. Be thankful that I do not deliver you to your mistress. I pity you; but begone!"

So not even the greatest of all the goddesses could help her against the vengeance of Venus.

Again she wandered on and on, helpless and despairing, till one of the servants of Venus met her and knew her.

Seizing Psyche by the hair, she dragged her into the presence of the terribly beautiful goddess, who broke into a laugh of cruel triumph when she found her rival in her power.

Venus delivered her over to her torturers, Anguish and Sorrow. They, having scourged and tormented her, brought her again before Venus, who flew at her like a fury, as if she would tear her limb from limb.

"You ugly slave!" cried Venus, as soon as she recovered breath; "you want a lover, do you? Well, perhaps you may get one if you know how to drudge; you certainly won't any other way. I'll give you a trial."

So she took wheat, barley, millet, poppy seed, vetches, lentils, and beans, mixed them up together, and said, "Sort out every seed into its proper heap before evening. If you can do that, you shall not be scourged again."

Psyche sat down before her task in silent despair, crushed in heart, and aching in every limb. She could only pray that death would come to her before nightfall; for she could not bear the thought of those cruel scourges. And so she sat motionless until a little white ant, taking more pity on her than Ceres or Juno, called together his whole tribe, who sorted out the heap, grain by grain, into proper parcels, in no time, and then ran away.

Judge of the surprise of Venus when she found the work done.

"Somebody has helped you," she said.

But she could not order her to be scourged, the work being done; so she threw her a piece of coarse bread for supper, and had her shut up in a wretched shed till day.

In the morning Venus came to her again. "Do you see yonder sheep, with golden fleeces, wandering without a shepherd? Go and bring me a piece of their wool, that you may escape another scourging."

Psyche set out, not to get the wool, but to drown herself in the river that ran along the meadow where the sheep were feeding.

She was about to leap into the water, when one of the reeds spoke to her, and said, murmuring, "Pollute not these pure waters by thy death, nor yet venture to approach yonder sheep during the heat of the sun; for they are fierce and savage, and they will slay thee with their horns. But when they are resting toward evening, creep into the meadow, and collect the wool that has clung to the bushes."

Thus Psyche brought to Venus a whole lapful of golden wool.

"Somebody has helped you," again said the goddess, angrily. But she had to keep her word.

Still she could not bring herself to believe that Psyche could have performed these tasks unaided. She strongly suspected Cupid, though she kept him closely shut up in his chamber, making believe that his scalded shoulder still wanted careful nursing, for fear he might come across Psyche. She was quite sure he had never left his chamber for a moment. Nevertheless she resolved to send Psyche next time where not Love himself could follow or help her.

"Do you see yonder mountain peak?" she said to her next morning. "From that peak falls a black fountain, as cold as ice. Take this urn, fill it with the cold black water, and bring it to me."

Psyche started off at once for the mountain peak, meaning to throw herself from it, and so bring her miseries to an end. But it was not so easy to reach the top as she had hoped. The black fountain fell headlong from the middle of a terrible rock into a still more dark and terrible ravine, from which fierce and horrible dragons stretched up their long necks to guard the waters; and the roar of the water as it fell was this, "Begone, or perish."

In the midst of her terror an eagle came flying overhead, and called out to her, "Do not touch the water: this is the spring of the Styx, that sacred and dreadful river by whom the gods swear. Give *me* your urn."

So, swooping down, he took the urn in his talons, and flew with it through the gaping jaws of the dragons so swiftly that they had not time to close upon him, or to pierce him with their fiery tongues. Thus he reached the water, filled the urn, and flew back with it to Psyche, who brought it to Venus, just as she had been bidden.

Venus was more enraged than ever; but this time she hid her anger with a smile.

"I see there is nothing too hard for you," she said. "So do me one little service before we make friends. Nobody else could do it; but anybody who is clever enough to steal the waters of the Styx can do everything. You see I have grown pale and thin with anxiety about my poor boy. Go as quickly as you can to the palace of King Pluto, and ask to see the Lady Proserpine. When you see her, say to her, 'Madam, Venus requests you to lend her a little of your beauty till to-morrow morning.' Here is a casket to bring it in; and be quick with your errand."

Then indeed did Psyche give herself up for lost. For she knew what you have read in the story of "The Gods and the Giants," that Pluto was the king of Hades, that underground world of ghosts and spirits where men and women go when they die. And of this world of Hades the Lady Proserpine was queen.

Thinking that the shortest way to the world below was the best, she went to the top of a high tower, meaning to hurl herself out of life headlong.

But the tower spoke to her: "Pause; for know that from the world where you are going none ever return. There is only one path by which you can reach Pluto's palace and come back again; and that path I will tell you. Listen carefully to all I say. In the southern part of Greece, in a hill called Tænarus, is hidden a cavern which you must find; and from this cavern a path, which no mortal has yet trodden, runs straight into the hill. Take the path, but provide yourself first with these things: two pieces of barley bread sopped in honey, one in each hand, and two pieces of money in your mouth. If anybody accosts you on the way, pass him by in silence. Give nothing to anybody with your hand. Show no pity. Help nobody. Taste nothing but dry bread, and open not the box you carry; for Venus knows you to be pitiful and helpful, and a little inquisitive as well, and will set traps for you to fall into. Therefore, be wise, and trust to nothing you see in the world of dreams and shadows. If you follow my directions, you may go and return in safety; if you fail in the least of them, you are a lost soul."

Psyche set off at once to the hill of Tænarus, where, with a honeysop in each hand and two silver coins in her mouth, she sought for the secret cavern. She found it at last, and started along the path, blacker than night, which wound downward into the heart of the earth.

After she had traveled many hours, the path became illuminated with a pale twilight, by which she could just manage to see, a strange sort of half light, such as is never seen aboveground. It seemed to Psyche as if the path would never end.

At last she saw figures approaching her in the distance; and these, as they approached, proved to be a lame man driving a lame ass laden with wood, which was slipping from its cords.

"Lady," said the lame man, "you see I am weak and helpless; help me to tie up my wood again, that it may not fall."

Psyche was just about to lay down her honey-sops and help him, when she remembered the tower's warning, and passed him by without a word.

On she went until she came to the bank of a broad river with water as black as ink; and just where the path ran down to the water was a ferryboat, in which sat a very old man, naked to the waist, and holding an oar. Psyche stepped into the boat, and the old man, in dead silence, pushed off, and began to row heavily across the black and sluggish stream.

When the boat reached the middle, she looked down, and saw a skinny hand raise itself slowly out of the water. Then she perceived that the hand belonged to a corpse-like form floating half under the black ooze, which, in a hollow voice, thus besought her: "Lady, for pity's sake take me into your boat, that I may reach the other side. Else must I float on and on in this river between life and death forever."

Psyche was going to bid the ferryman take the poor, half-dead creature into the boat, when she remembered the tower's warning against pity, and let the body drift by.

Arrived at the other side, the ferryman held out his hand for his fee. Psyche was about to take one of the coins from her mouth, when she suddenly remembered the tower's warning to give nothing to anybody with her hand. So, bringing one of the coins between her teeth, she dropped it into the open palm of the ferryman, and went her way.

A little farther on she came upon some old women weaving.

"Lady," said the eldest, "we are old, and it is dark, and our eyes are dim, and we have much to do before nightfall. Help us with our web, we pray you."

Psyche was about to comply, when she remembered the tower's warning against giving help, and passed on.

Still on and on she went until she reached a huge palace built of black marble, which she knew at once to be the abode of Pluto and Proserpine.

But how was she to enter? For on the threshold stood a monstrous dog, with three heads and six flaming eyes, barking thunderously, and with horrible yawning jaws. This was the dog Cerberus, who never sleeps, and guards the palace of Pluto night and day.

There was only one chance of passing him, and Psyche took it. She threw him one of her honeysops, and ran past him while he was swallowing it.

In the hall beyond the threshold sat Proserpine, queen of Hades and goddess of the underworld, dark and beautiful, and crowned with white poppies and stars, with a two-pronged scepter in her hand.

She received Psyche kindly, made her sit down on a cushion beside her, and bade the attendants bring meat, fruit, and wine. Psyche, hungry and thirsty after her long journey, was about to eat, when she remembered the tower's warning, and refreshed herself with a little dry bread only.

Then rising, she said to Proserpine, " Madam, Venus requests you to lend her a little of your beauty till to-morrow morning, and here is a casket for me to carry it in."

"With pleasure," said Proserpine, taking the casket.

She opened it, breathed into it, closed it again, and returned it to Psyche, who, having performed her errand, departed reverently.

She got past Cerberus by throwing him her other honeysop, and gave the ferryman her other piece of money to row her back across the river. And so, without further peril or adventure, she reached the cavern in the hill, and the sunshine, and the broad light of day, with the casketful of beauty safe in her hand.

Then a great curiosity came upon her to know what this beauty of the underworld might be, beauty so great that even Venus desired it to add to her charms. Finally her curiosity grew so strong that she could withstand it no longer, and the tower's last warning was forgotten. What harm could a single glimpse do?

So, first timidly, then more boldly, she raised the lid of the casket.

And from the casket into which Proserpine had breathed there came forth a deep sleep, which fell over Psyche, so that first she felt faint, then her blood turned dull and cold, and the color left her cheeks, then her heart stopped, and then her breath: the sleep of death had come upon her, and she lay in the sunshine, pale and cold. For death is the beauty of Proserpine.

Cupid, wearied out of patience by being kept prisoner in his chamber on account of a trifling hurt that no longer pained him, and loving his lost Psyche as much as ever, thought and thought how he might escape from the tiresome watchfulness of his mother. And it happened at last that the nurse on duty threw open the window for a moment to let in a breath of air.

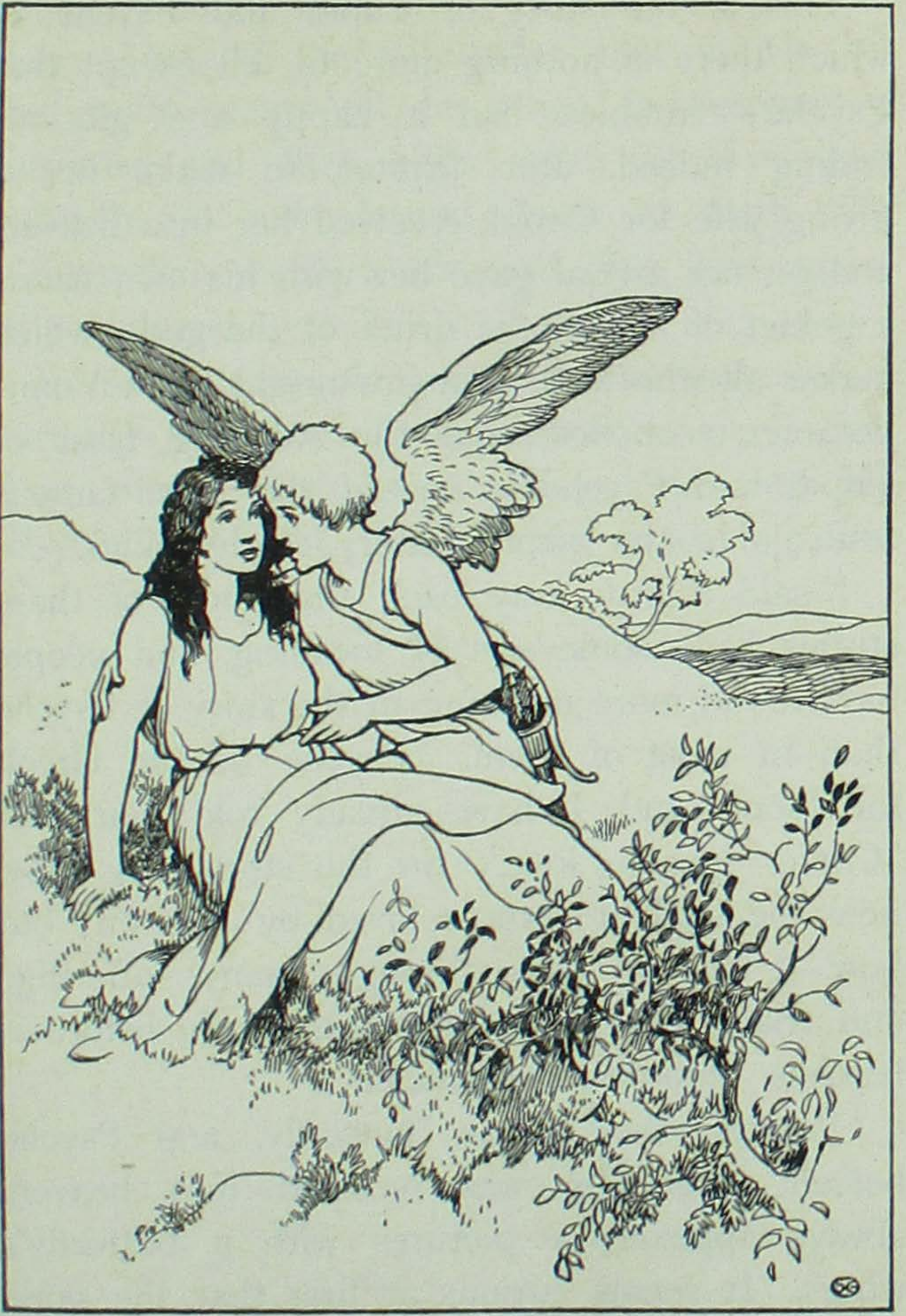
That moment was enough for Cupid: spreading his wings, he was through the window and away before the nurse could tell him from a bird. His wings had grown the stronger from their long rest, and he reveled in the freedom of the sunshine and the open air. Never had life felt so full of joy. Ah, if he could only find Psyche, not his mother herself should part them any more. And surely he would find her, for what cannot Love find or do?

He fled fast to the palace in the secret valley, but she was not there. There was scarce a corner of the world where he did not fly, in less time than it would take the very swiftest of birds. And at last —

He found her; and his wings lost their strength, and his heart melted for sorrow when he saw her stretched in the sleep of death on the hillside, beautiful still, but with the beauty of Proserpine. The fatal casket lay open beside her, so he knew what had befallen. "Alas!" he thought, "if I had not flown from her in my anger, she would not have died."

He clasped her in his arms; he kissed her lips with enough love to wake the dead, if such a thing could be.

And such a thing could be; such a thing was. For at the kiss of Love the sleep of death began slowly to pass away. Back came the color to her lips and cheeks; her heart fluttered and beat; she breathed; she opened her eyes. And then she woke in his arms, glad and alive.

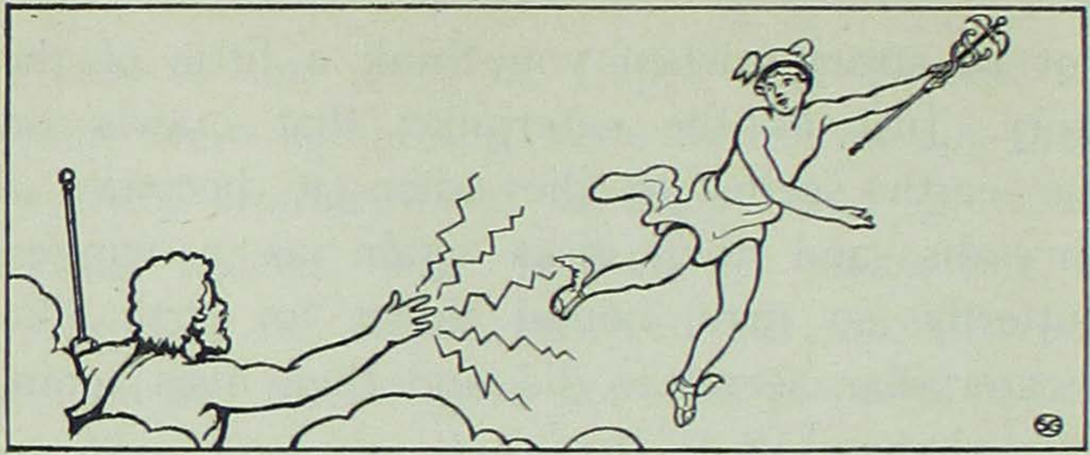


This is the story of Cupid and Psyche, of which there is nothing more to tell except that Psyche's troubles had a happy and glorious ending indeed. For Jupiter, to make her a fitting wife for Cupid, received her into heaven, and on her arrival gave her with his own hands a goblet of nectar, the drink of the gods, which makes all who taste of it immortal. Even Venus became reconciled, and the wedding feast of Cupid and Psyche is one of the most famous festivals in the whole history of the skies.

I said a little way back that most of these stories have some sort of meaning, and people have found more meaning in the story of Psyche than in most of them. 'Psyche' is the Greek for 'soul,' and I have already told you that 'Cupid' means 'love.' So the story may show how the soul of man is loved by Heaven; but how it has to pass through many sufferings and trials, and at last through death, before it reaches immortal happiness.

'Psyche' also means 'butterfly,' and Psyche herself, after she was received into heaven, always appears in pictures with a butterfly's wings. It seems curious at first that the same word means 'soul' and 'butterfly'; but it is not so strange when you think a little of the story. Just as the caterpillar that crawls on the earth seems to die when it becomes a chrysalis, and then rises again as a winged butterfly, so man, bound down to earth like a caterpillar, seems to die, and then lives again, only changed.

In some very old pictures you may see a butterfly flying out from between a man's lips. That means that he is dying, and that his 'Psyche,' his 'soul,' or 'butterfly,' is leaving him.



CHAPTER XVIII

MERCURY AND IRIS

OFTEN in these stories you have met with Mercury, and have heard that he was Jupiter's chief messenger. The office he held made him so busy with all the affairs of heaven, earth, and Hades that there is scarcely a story without him; and it is therefore time to know something more about him.

Now you must know that the people who, ages ago, made these stories about the gods and goddesses in whom they believed, thought that the earth (which you know to be a globe) was a large island surrounded by a boundless ocean.

The sky, so they imagined, was a solid dome, on which the sun, moon, and stars made their various journeys. Every morning Phœbus drove the chariot of the sun forth from the stable beyond the ocean in the east, across the blue dome, till it sank beyond the western ocean, and then passed underground back to the eastern stable, so as to be ready to start again.

The moon, that is to say, the chariot of Diana, also had her proper course across the dome, and so had every planet and star. And this dome, or sky, with all its wonders, was supported on the shoulders of Atlas, a gigantic Titan, condemned to this task (some say) for having helped the giants in their war against the gods.

This Atlas was a great king, and his kingdom stretched westward till it touched the ocean which surrounded the earth. And that is why this part of the sea is called the Ocean of Atlas, or Atlantic Ocean.

The name of his kingdom was Mauretania, now called Morocco, where he owned a thousand flocks, and orchards with apples of gold. And he had seven beautiful daughters. Six of these married gods; the seventh married a mortal. After their death they were honored by being set as stars in the sky, where you may often see the seven sisters clustered together in a beautiful constellation called the Pleiades. But it is very difficult to see the one that married a mortal instead of a god, for it shines dimly. If you can see more than six of the seven sisters you have good eyes.

The brightest of all the Pleiades was the one chosen by Jupiter. She had a son named Mercury, and a promising child he must have been. For on the very day he was born he stole the oxen of King Admetus of Thessaly, although (as you may remember) Apollo himself was then the king's herdsman.

And Mercury not only stole the oxen, but ran away with Apollo's quiver of arrows. Proud of this feat, he stole the zone, or girdle, of Venus, the sword of Mars, and the hammer of Vulcan; and at last he carried off the very scepter of Jupiter.

Instead of punishing him, however, Jupiter was so delighted with his cleverness and impudence that he made Mercury his chief messenger and cupbearer. He also gave him a winged cap, wings for his heels, a short sword, and a magic staff, or wand, round which two serpents coiled.

When Mercury put on his winged cap, he became invisible; and the wings for his heels made him able to fly faster than lightning to any place he pleased. With the staff he drove the flocks of dead souls to Hades, for that was one of his duties. He could also send people to sleep with it, or bring back the dead to life by touching them. You will know a picture or statue of Mercury by the magic wand and by the wings on his cap and heels.

He needed to be quick, active, and clever, for he had a great deal to do, so much that Jupiter relieved him of the office of cupbearer and gave it to a young shepherd, named Ganymede.

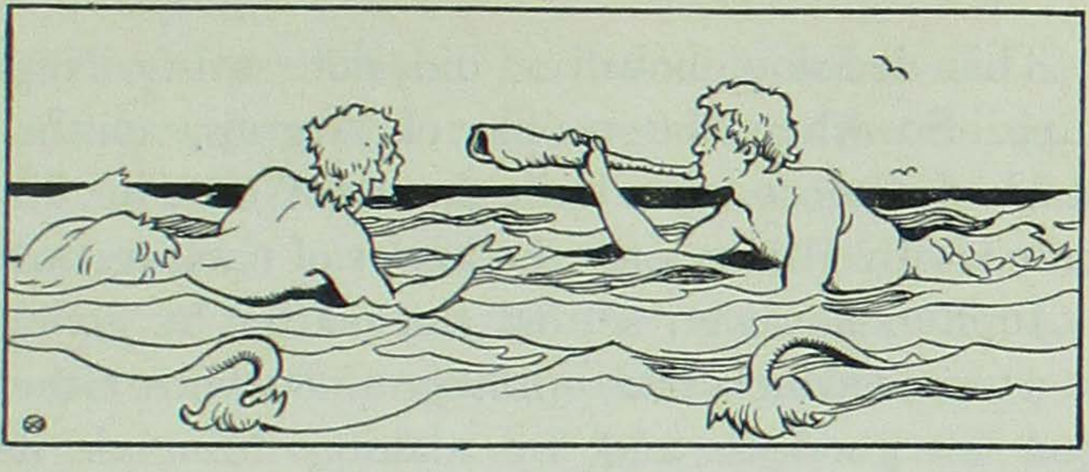
Mercury had to carry all Jupiter's messages, which, of course, obliged him to be almost everywhere at once; he had to see that the laws of the great council of the gods were properly carried out; to keep Jupiter's secrets; to know everything that was going on all over the world; to conduct the souls of the dead to Hades: each one of which things was enough, you would think, to take up his whole time.

However, he managed to do it all, and a great deal more, and was not very particular how. For it must be owned that Mercury, though a god, was not above lying and cheating whenever it suited his purpose. He was wonderfully eloquent, and could make anybody believe anything.

And he was the patron, that is to say, the friend and protector, of merchants, travelers, orators, and thieves.

I ought to tell you, also, that the planet nearest to the sun is called Mercury, and that 'mercury' is another name for the metal quicksilver.

Juno also had a chief messenger, a goddess named Iris. The path of Iris from heaven to earth and back again is the rainbow; so whenever you see a rainbow you may know that Iris is bringing a message down from Juno. Indeed, the Greek word 'iris' also means 'rainbow.'



CHAPTER XIX

NEPTUNE

IN THE story of "The Gods and the Giants" you read that when Jupiter became king of the whole world, he made his two brothers, Neptune and Pluto, kings under him. He made Neptune king of the sea; Pluto he made king of Hades.

You have also read, in the story of Minerva, how Neptune contended with the goddess of wisdom for the honor of naming the capital of Attica, and how he produced the first horse by striking the earth with his trident.

You will remember that the honor was given to Minerva, because she produced the olive, the emblem of peace, and therefore better for mankind than the horse, the emblem of war.

This decision, however, did not satisfy Neptune. So when the people of Argolis, another state of Greece, also built a capital city, he disputed with Minerva for the honor of naming that.

Jupiter, however, settled the matter by giving it a name which had nothing to do with either god or goddess, and by making Minerva its patroness and Neptune its patron.

But this did not please Neptune either. He wanted to have some city or piece of dry land all to himself, which was natural enough for a god who had nothing of his own but the sea. So he went to law with Apollo for the possession of the Isthmus of Corinth.

The case was tried before Briareus, the Cyclops with fifty heads and a hundred hands, as judge. He decided that Neptune should have the isthmus, all except a certain headland, which was given to Apollo.

But Neptune was not even yet satisfied.

What was the sea and one little isthmus when Jupiter had all earth and air and sky, and when Pluto had the still greater world below? Besides, Jupiter ruled over the immortal gods and living men and women, and Pluto over all the dead. But Neptune had neither gods nor men, dead or alive, for subjects; he had only fishes and sea monsters, creatures really not worth the ruling.

It is true he had all sorts of treasures got from shipwrecks; but what is the good of gold and jewels at the bottom of the sea? And he had many wonderful and beautiful things belonging to him by nature, pearls, and seaweed, and coral, and amber; but he had no use for them. At any rate he was thoroughly discontented, and thought Jupiter's division of the universe exceedingly unfair.

It so happened that, while he was in this envious state of mind, Juno was furious against Jupiter for throwing Vulcan, the god of fire, out of heaven, and Apollo was seeking revenge for the death of Æsculapius, the god of medicine.

So these three, Neptune, Juno, and Apollo, made a conspiracy against Jupiter. Their plot was to excite all the gods and goddesses to rebel against their king, to take him by surprise, to imprison him forever and to get — I do not know what they meant to get by it; most likely, like all rebels, they did not know that themselves.

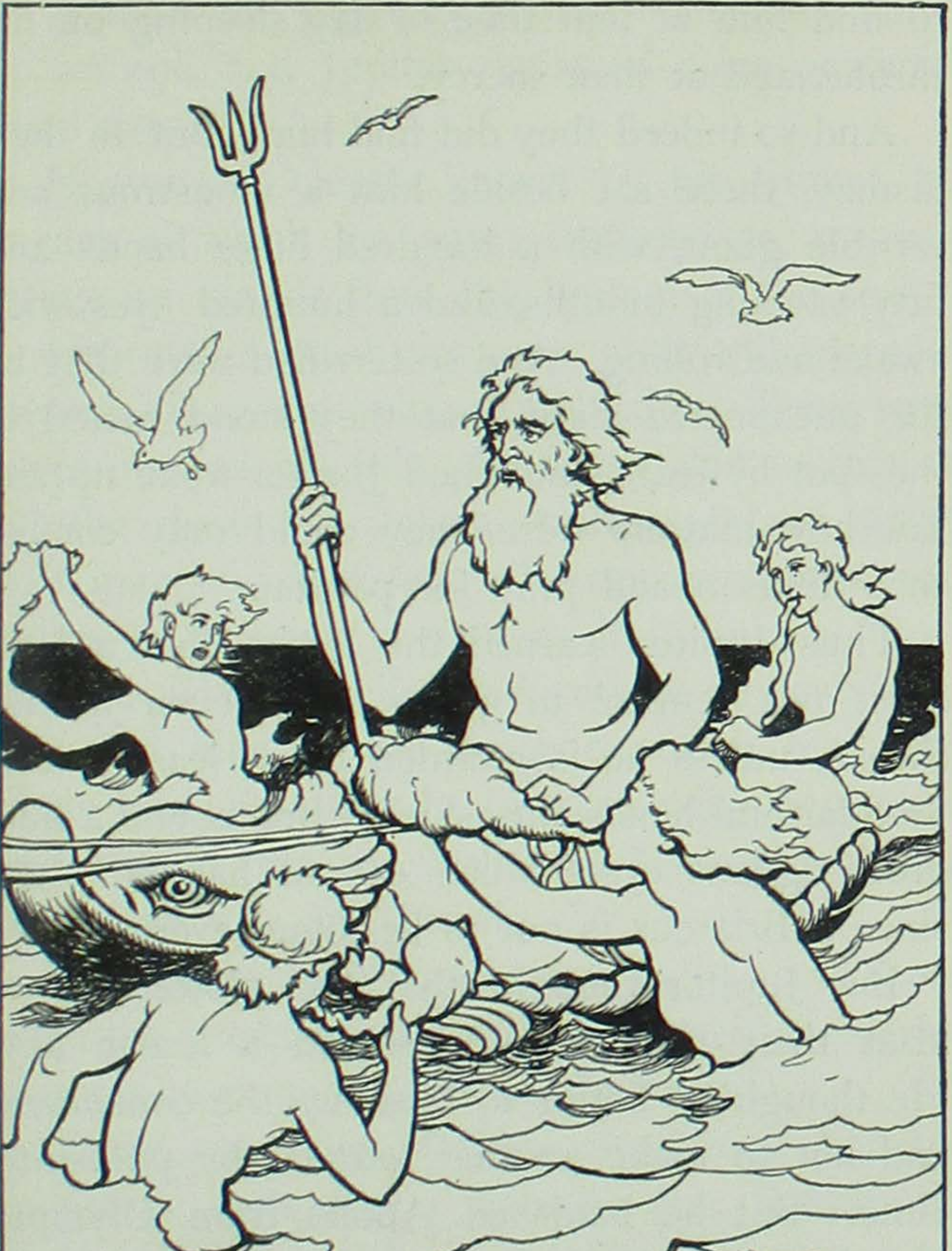
However, in one way or another, by promises, and by working up all sorts of grievances, they drew nearly every god and goddess into their treason, of which Jupiter, in his trust of them all, had not the faintest suspicion. He went on ruling and feasting, little guessing that his own wife, his own brother, and the whole of his court were secret traitors. Even Minerva, in spite of her wisdom and her old quarrel with Neptune, is said to have joined in the plot against her own father, though this is hard to believe.

The plotters made only one mistake: they forgot that traitors must expect treachery. There was a famous sea nymph named Thetis, a favorite of Jupiter, and she, having been admitted into the plot, tried to think of some way of saving the king of gods and men.

But what could one sea nymph do? If she went and told Jupiter, he would not believe her; he would most likely only punish her for lying and slander. So, in her trouble, she went for advice to the giant Briareus, who had fifty heads to think with instead of only one.

Having thought with them all, one after another, he said at last, "Leave it to me."

At length the time came for carrying out the plot. The conspirators held a great meeting, and, having talked themselves into a great state of rage against Jupiter, marched in a body into the council chamber of Olympus, where they expected



to find him at that time of day sleeping on his throne, and at their mercy.

And so indeed they did find him. But, to their dismay, there sat beside him a monstrous and terrible giant, with a hundred huge hands and fifty yawning mouths, and a hundred eyes wide awake and rolling. And so terrified were they by the unexpected sight that they stood rooted to the spot by fear; and when Jupiter woke up and saw how matters were, they could only confess their treason and pray for pardon.

Thus Jupiter learned the lesson that a king must not venture to go to sleep, even on his throne, unless he is guarded by at least a hundred faithful hands, fifty shrewd brains, and a hundred vigilant eyes, which cannot happen often, since a Briareus is not to be found every day.

But Jupiter thought that the plotters, or at least their ringleaders, deserved a lesson also. He thought it better to hush up the conspiracy, and not to make another scandal by punishing Juno. But he banished Apollo from Olympus for nine years for having killed the Cyclopes, as told in the story of Marsyas; and he condemned Neptune, by way of hard labor, to build the walls of the famous city of Troy.

And so the great Olympian conspiracy came to an end, and Jupiter remained more powerful than ever.

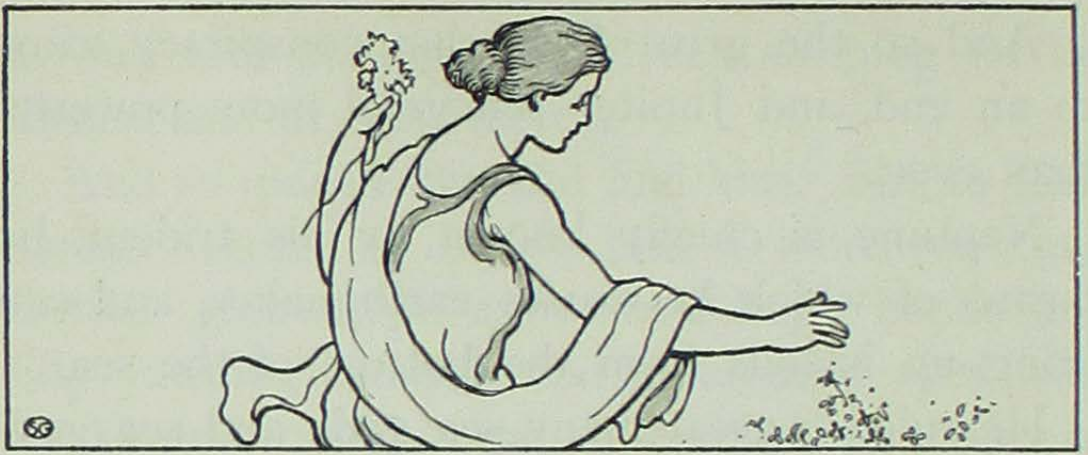
Neptune is chiefly known by his trident, by means of which he causes earthquakes, and can bring up islands from the bottom of the sea.

He ruled a great many sea gods and sea goddesses, his queen being Amphitrite. There were Oceanus and his wife, the father and mother of all the rivers; Triton, a strange god, in shape half man and half fish, who makes storms and calms by blowing a shell as if it were a horn; Proteus, who foretells the future to anybody who can find him on the seashore, catch him, and chain him up so that he cannot change his shape and escape into the sea; and Nereus, with his long blue hair and beard.

Then there were many sea nymphs; and there were the sirens, mermaids who by their wonderful singing lured sailors to their destruction.

There were the Harpies also, three horrible monsters, each with a woman's face, a vulture's body, and feet and hands having sharp claws for toes and fingers: these were the whirlwinds.

But it is impossible to make a list of the wonders of the sea.



CHAPTER XX

THE KING AND QUEEN OF THE DEAD

Not far from Enna's walls there lies a lake,
Pergus by name: than which not Caÿster's stream
Is fuller of the songs of gliding swans.
A woodland girds it with a veil of leaves
To shelter from the heat; where the fresh soil
Bears purple flowers, and keeps perpetual spring.

THUS the poet Ovid describes the pleasant place, in the island of Sicily, where the nymph Proserpine, the beautiful daughter of Ceres, goddess of the fruits of the earth, was one day gathering violets and lilies. She and her companions were trying who should gather the most, and were happy and merry.

In her search for flowers, Proserpine wandered out of sight of her companions, who went on gathering and singing and laughing, when suddenly their merriment was stopped by a piercing scream for help; and then by another and another, till the cries grew fainter and fainter, and were at last heard no more.

Where was Proserpine? They were sure it was her cries they had heard: and, though they searched through the whole wood, they could not find her anywhere. All they could do was to go to Ceres, and tell her that her daughter had disappeared, and could not be found for all their seeking.

Ceres, who is the best and kindest of all the goddesses, loved her daughter dearly, and was disconsolate at the news. Though always so busy with seedtime and harvest, fields and orchards, she set out to seek for her lost Proserpine, or at least to find out what had become of her.

In her search she wandered over the whole world; nay, she explored the very depths of the sea; but all in vain. She questioned gods, goddesses, nymphs, fauns, and satyrs, men and women; but none could give her any news of Proserpine.

She never slept, but set fire to the pine trees on the top of Mount Ætna to serve as torches, so that she might see to search by night as well as by day.

She forgot to eat and drink, and, though the goddess of corn and plenty, she would have perished of hunger and thirst had not an old woman, though ignorant who she was, taken pity on her, and given her some hot porridge, which Ceres drank eagerly, so eagerly that a boy who saw her drinking jeered at her for a glutton.

This was too much for the goddess, in her despair, to bear. She for once lost her temper, and threw the rest of the hot porridge over the grinning boy, whom it turned into a spotted lizard for laughing at a stranger's needs and an old woman's charity.

At length, worn out and desperate, the poor mother wandered back to Sicily, so changed that nobody knew her. Nor could she say who she was, for grief had made her dumb. In this state she arrived at a place near to where Proserpine had been lost.

And here one day, while looking at a pool (for she never ceased to look everywhere), she saw her daughter's girdle lying at the bottom of the water. Then, giving up her last spark of hope, she found her voice again, and mourned aloud.

Her grief was terrible to hear and see. She cursed the earth, so that it no longer brought forth corn; and she broke the plows: the seeds perished in the fields, and the cattle in their stalls.

But one day Ceres, roaming along the banks of a river in Greece, plainly heard its waters say, "We have seen Proserpine. She is unhappy; but she is a great queen: she is the wife of Pluto, the king of the underworld."

Then Ceres knew that Proserpine had been carried off by the great and dreadful god Pluto, to whom, when Jupiter divided the world, Hades had been given, the underground kingdom of ghosts and of the souls of the dead, the greatest kingdom of all.

It was true. Pluto had seen Proserpine while she was gathering flowers in the wood, had snatched her up into his chariot with black horses, and, in spite of her struggles and cries for help, had driven off with her to his underground palace through a cavern which he opened with a touch of his two-pronged scepter: the cavern then filled up with water, and became the lake at the bottom of which Ceres had found the girdle.

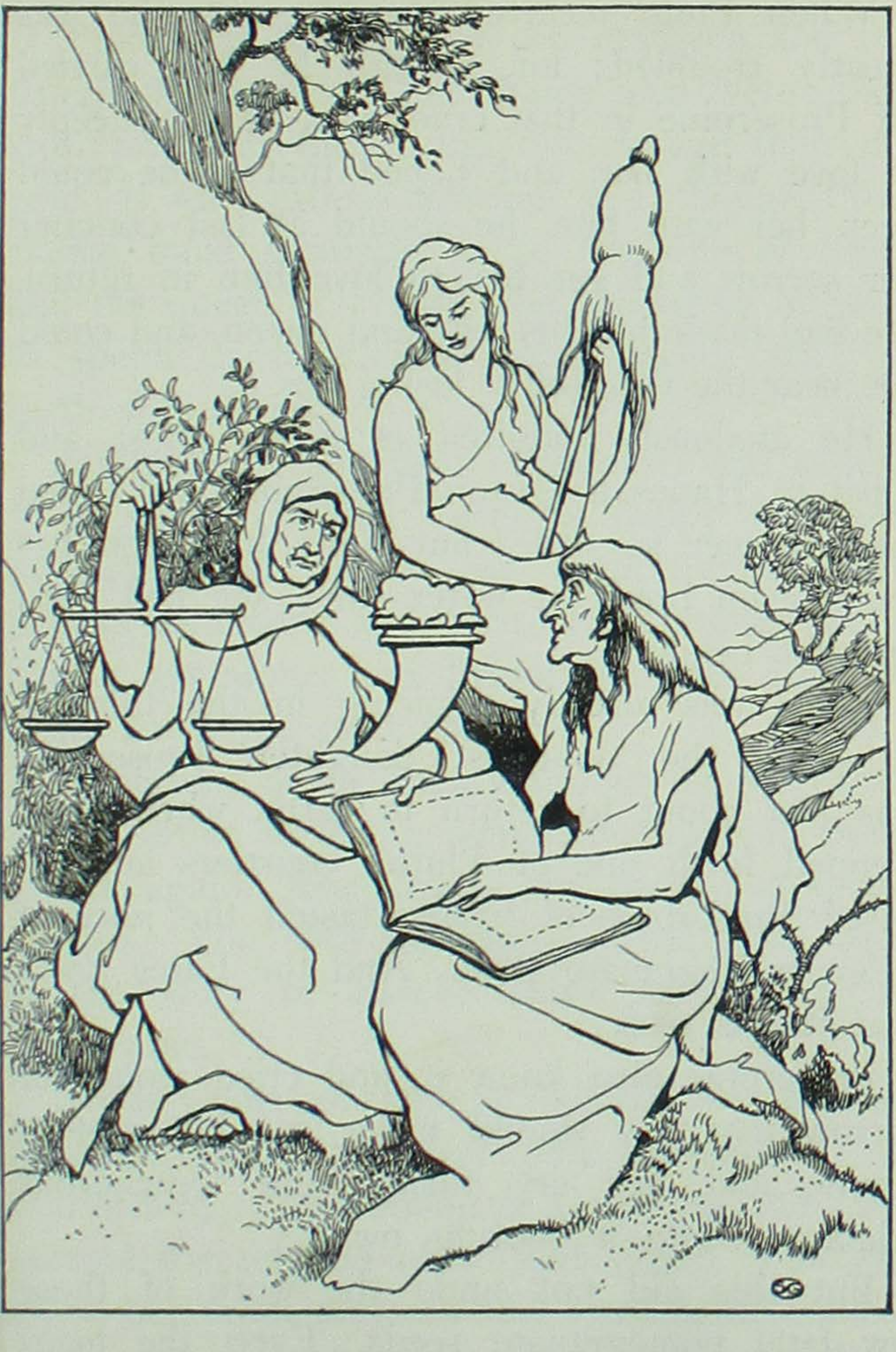
As soon as she could recover her senses, Ceres flew up to heaven, threw herself before Jupiter, and passionately demanded that her daughter should be given back to her.

It was a difficult question for Jupiter to settle. He pitied Ceres with all his heart, and wished to help her. But high reasons of state made him unwilling to offend Pluto: and then, who had ever heard of anybody's coming back from Hades? That would be against all the laws of gods and men.

But there were three mysterious beings, of whom I have not yet told you, called the Fates: three sisters who rule over life and death, and whose will even the gods of heaven, even Jupiter himself, must obey. Somewhere or other they determine the course of human life and the destiny of nations. Nothing can happen without their leave; and nobody can prevent from coming to pass whatever the Fates decree.

So Jupiter inquired of the Fates if it was their will that Proserpine should return from below.

"She may return," they said, "unless she has eaten or drunk in the kingdom of Pluto. If she has tasted the food of death, then she may not return."



When Pluto received this message, he was greatly troubled; for, though he had carried off Proserpine in that cruel way, he was deeply in love with her, and hoped that, if he could keep her with him, he should at last conquer her sorrow and get her to love him in return. He had made her his wife and queen, and could not bear the thought of losing her.

He anxiously inquired of every ghost and spirit in Hades if Queen Proserpine had tasted food, if ever so little; but none had seen her touch even bread or water since she had been brought below.

Ceres was already rejoicing in the thought of seeing her long-lost daughter. Proserpine was just about to return to earth, when there stepped forth one of Pluto's courtiers and accused Proserpine of having tasted the juice of a few pomegranate seeds. And the Fates knew that it was true.

Proserpine also knew it, and cried aloud for sorrow that she should never see her mother again; and her cry turned the treacherous talebearer into a hooting owl.

But this did not undo the work of those few fatal pomegranate seeds. Even the heart of Pluto was touched by the mother's and the daughter's despair. The Fates also were filled with pity, but they could not change their decree. It was settled, however, that, though Proserpine must continue to be the wife of Pluto and the queen of Hades, she should be allowed to spend eight months out of every year on earth with Ceres.

And that is the reason of summer and winter. It is summer when Ceres is happy with her daughter, and makes the earth rejoice with flowers and fruit and corn. It is winter when she is left alone, and Proserpine goes back to Pluto until the next spring.

Proserpine is the beauty and joy of the earth, which seems to die in winter, but only to come to life again. And she is the beauty of death besides. You will remember what you read in the story of Psyche about the beauty of Proserpine.

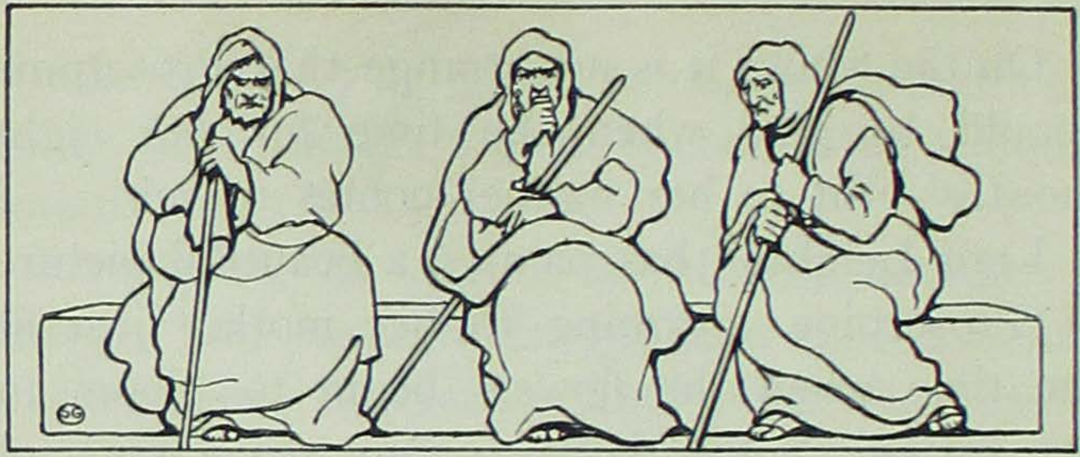
It was Ceres who taught men to plow, harrow, sow, and reap; and they were grateful to her everywhere. The worship of Ceres was the chief part of the religion of ancient times. You will know her, from pictures and statues, as a noble and stately goddess, crowned with a garland of corn, holding a lighted torch, and sometimes riding in a chariot drawn by horses or winged dragons.

Proserpine, as queen of Hades, became a strange and mysterious goddess indeed. One of her names is Hecate, and under that name she rules over magic. She often wears a veil, and a crown of stars; and, like Pluto, carries the scepter with two prongs, differing from Neptune's trident, which has three.

Pluto was a dark and gloomy god. No temples were ever built to him, and only black animals were sacrificed upon his altars. But he was just, although pitiless and stern. He sits on a throne of sulphur in his underground palace, from which flow the four rivers of Hades: one called the river of lamentation; another, the river of sorrow; a third, the river of fire; and the fourth, the famous Lethe, or the river of forgetfulness. On his left hand sits Proserpine, near to whom stand the Furies, three fiends with snakes instead of hair; on his right stand the Fates, who allot the lives and deaths of men; at his feet lies the three-headed dog, Cerberus; and the Harpies hover over him, waiting for his command.

On the whole, it is not strange that Proserpine should be glad when the time for her eight months' visit to her mother comes round.

Lord Leighton has painted a beautiful picture of Proserpine returning to her mother just at the time when the flowers begin to bloom in the spring. Some day you may see a copy of his famous work.



CHAPTER XXI

THE KINGDOM OF HADES

'HADES,' the name of the kingdom ruled by Pluto and Proserpine, means 'invisible,' because the lower world was unseen by living eyes. This invisible kingdom was surrounded by the river Styx, by which the gods swore their sacred oath, and which flowed round and round in nine circles before springing up into the living world.

Even when the Styx rose out of the ground in the land of Arcadia, in Greece, it still remained a cold black river, whose waters were poisonous to drink; but if anybody was bold enough to bathe in them, and lucky enough to come out alive, no weapon could ever afterwards have any power to wound him.

Some people say that Thetis (the goddess who saved Jupiter from the great plot) dipped her child Achilles, head foremost, into the Styx as soon as he was born, holding him by the left heel between her finger and thumb. But she forgot that her thumb and finger prevented the water from touching the skin just where she held him. And so, when he grew up, though no weapon could hurt him anywhere else, yet, when he was hit by an arrow in the left heel, he died of the wound.

When anybody died, his body was buried or burned by his friends, and his soul left him and went down to Hades, till it reached the banks of the Styx. Here it waited for Charon's ferryboat, about which you read in the story of Psyche. If its friends had buried its body properly, they had given it a small silver coin to pay the ferryman, who took the money and at once rowed it across the river. But if the soul had no money to pay for its passage, it had to wait for a hundred years, shivering and cold.

Arrived on the other side, the soul was taken before the three judges of Hades. All three had been kings on earth, so famous for wisdom and justice that, when they died, Pluto made them the judges of the dead. These decided what was to be done with the soul. If it had been virtuous during its life on earth, it was allowed to enter Elysium, or the region of happiness; if it had been wicked, it was condemned to the horrible prison of Tartarus, there to be punished by torture.

Elysium, which is also called 'the Elysian fields,' or 'the Islands of the Blest,' was a delightful place, like the most beautiful country in the finest weather, never too hot or too cold, and full of sweet scents and sounds.

There the souls of the happy enjoyed forever, without ever getting tired, whatever had given them the most pleasure on earth, hunting, or war, or learning, or music, or whatever it might be: only all their pleasures became innocent and noble, and even if they fought, it was all in friendship and without harm. Nothing was quite real there: it was more like a beautiful and happy dream, lasting forever.

Some of the very best and greatest human souls were taken up into Mount Olympus and made 'demigods,' that is to say, 'half gods'; but of course this was a rare honor. The dream of Elysium was thought to be reward enough for the souls which, in their lives, had done more good than evil.

Tartarus, the place of torment, was farther below the earth than the earth is below the sky, and was surrounded by three brazen walls, and by the river of fire.

The only entrance was through a high tower, with gates which not even the gods could open, and guarded by the three-headed dog Cerberus, which never slept; and the air was three times darker than the darkest midnight, lighted only by the terrible flames of the river of fire.

The jailers were Nemesis and the Furies. Nemesis is the great stern power who never allows the guilty to escape from their just punishment, nor the good to lose their just reward. If people are happier or more fortunate than they deserve to be, she always, either in this life or in Hades, gives them enough misery at last, until they are just as happy or unhappy as they deserve to be, and neither less nor more; and if they seem less happy or less fortunate than they deserve, she makes it up to them in the end. She is often so strangely slow in coming, that she has been called lame. But she always comes at last: if she is slow, she is sure.

There was once a king named Polycrates, ruler of the island of Samos, in the Ægean Sea, who was famous for his marvelous good fortune. Nothing ever went wrong with him; he did not seem able to fail in anything, even if he tried; he knew neither misfortune nor sorrow. Though only the prince of a little island, he became, by one stroke of good luck after another, the most powerful monarch of his time, so that the kings of the greatest nations came to his court to do him homage and admire his glory.

Among these was Amasis, King of Egypt, who was frightened at the sight of such prosperity, and thought, "This is surely more than any mortal deserves: Nemesis must surely be near at hand."

So he advised Polycrates to bring some misfortune upon himself, for the sake of keeping Nemesis away.

At first Polycrates laughed at such counsel; but, to remove the friendly fears of Amasis, he threw into the sea a ring with a magnificent seal, which he prized the most of all his jewels, and the loss of which made him really unhappy; so you may guess how little unhappiness he had ever known before.

A few days afterwards, however, while at dinner with Amasis, he happened to cut open a large fish; and behold, inside the fish he found the ring, which thus came back to him from the bottom of the sea.

Instantly Amasis rose from the table and hurried back to Egypt, exclaiming, "I dare not have anything more to do with so fortunate a man: Nemesis must be at the door."

And he was right; and when she came, she came indeed. From the hour when the ring was found in the fish, all the prosperity of Polycrates departed from him. He sank lower and lower; until at last he was treacherously captured by the governor of one of his own cities, and put to a shameful death by torture.

You will often hear people speak of "the ring of Polycrates." When they do, they mean (or ought to mean) that a life of mixed joy and sorrow, such as most of us have, is what most of us deserve; and that this is the happiest as well as the best for us in the long run. It is not good for us to know nothing of sorrow or pain. And if we ever feel that we suffer unjustly, — well, Nemesis, the slow but the sure, will make it up to us in the end.

However, I must go back to Tartarus, in spite of its unpleasantness. I was speaking of the Furies, who served under Nemesis as its jailers. These were three creatures like women, with hissing and writhing snakes instead of hair, holding a torch in one hand, and a whip made of live scorpions in the other.

These whips were the whips of *conscience*, with which they scourged and stung the souls both of the dead and the living. They were the chief servants of Nemesis, because the stings of conscience are the most terrible of all her punishments.

The Furies were the most dreadful creatures in or out of Hades. Their name means the 'desperate madness' of those whom the gods or Fates have cursed. People had such awe and horror of them that they dared not name them. When they wanted to speak of them, they always called them "the Gracious Goddesses," just as timid people in England used to say "the good folk" instead of "the fairies," for fear of making them angry by naming their real name.

The tortures of Tartarus were of all sorts and kinds. Among the evil souls which suffered there, the most famous were the three wicked kings Ixion, Sisyphus, and Tantalus.

Ixion was tied by his arms and legs to the spokes of a wheel, which whirled round and round at full speed without ever giving him one moment's rest.

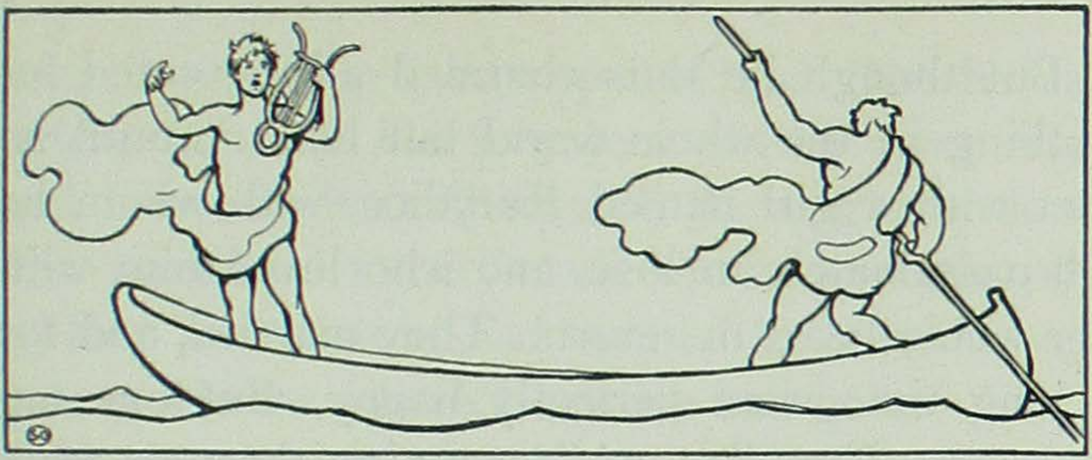
Sisyphus had to carry up to the top of a high and steep hill a huge stone, which, as soon as he got it up, instantly rolled to the bottom again, so that his labor had no end.

The torment of Tantalus was perhaps the worst of all. Maddened with hunger and thirst, he stood in the midst of a lake whose cool waters reached to his chin, while over his head hung the most delicious fruits. When he tried to drink, the water fled from him; and when he tried to grasp the fruits, the wind wafted them away. Being 'tantalized' means being 'treated like Tantalus.'

Then there were the forty-nine daughters of King Dananus, who had all murdered their husbands, and were condemned to fill sieves with water, which of course ran out through the holes as soon as they poured it in. There had been fifty daughters, but the fiftieth had taken no part in her sisters' crime.

There was also the wicked giant Tityus, who was so huge that his body covered nine acres of ground. He was punished by being perpetually devoured by vultures.

Souls not good enough for Elysium, but not bad enough for Tartarus, were treated in another way. Some were sent to wander about the world as homeless ghosts. Others were given to drink of the waters of the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, which threw them into a dreamless sleep forever.



CHAPTER XXII

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

IN CENTRAL Greece, on the heights of Mount Helicon, by the spring of water called Hippocrene, and on the peak of Parnassus, whence flows forth the fountain of Castalia, dwelt the Muses, the nine gracious goddesses of literature, art, and science, among whose gifts to men are music, poetry, painting, eloquence, and all the pleasures of the mind.

The Muse who had the sweetest voice was named Calliope; and her son, named Orpheus, grew up to be the most wonderful musician that ever was known. When he sang and played, it was as if his mother's voice were singing to Apollo's lyre, so that he charmed gods as well as men.

But though he thus charmed all, he cared for nothing in the whole world but his art, until he met with a girl named Eurydice, with whom he fell passionately in love, and who loved him with her whole heart in return. They married, and for a long time were perfectly happy. But one unlucky day Eurydice, while running through some long grass, was stung in the foot by a poisonous snake; and she died.

To Orpheus it was like losing his own soul; and it was indeed bitterly cruel to have lost Eurydice in the midst of their happiness together. Nothing could comfort him.

He could only wander out among the hills and streams with his lyre, lamenting Eurydice, and imploring her to come back to him, in such heart-broken passionate music that the very rivers and mountains and winds seemed to find a voice, and to join with him in his ceaseless prayer of "Eurydice! come back to me, even from the grave."

And so for days and nights he wandered, singing the same song to his lyre, with all his heart and soul, till it seemed impossible that death itself should be deaf to such a prayer.

At last a strange thing befell. So desperately sweet did his music grow that the earth could bear it no longer, but opened; so that he saw before him the black waters of the river Styx, and Charon's boat filled with its freight of souls. His wonderful music, made more wonderful still by love and sorrow, had opened to him the very gate of Hades, where Eurydice had gone.

Hope rose in his heart. Still playing, he stepped into the boat and crossed the Styx, none hindering him, or even asking him for his fee. The three stern judges of the dead let him pass unquestioned: even they forgot their duty in the music of his voice and lyre.

As he played and sang, there floated round him, drawn by his music, thousands of souls like flocks of birds. The sound of his lyre reached even into that lower abode of suffering called Tartarus. Cerberus crouched harmless; the Furies felt a thrill of pity; for one whole instant Tantalus forgot his thirst, the wheel of Ixion ceased whirling, and the stone of Sisyphus stopped rolling downhill.

Thus Orpheus played his way into the very presence of Pluto and Proserpine. Pluto pitied him; but it was Proserpine who, no doubt remembering her own mother's sorrows and wanderings, thought of a way to help him.

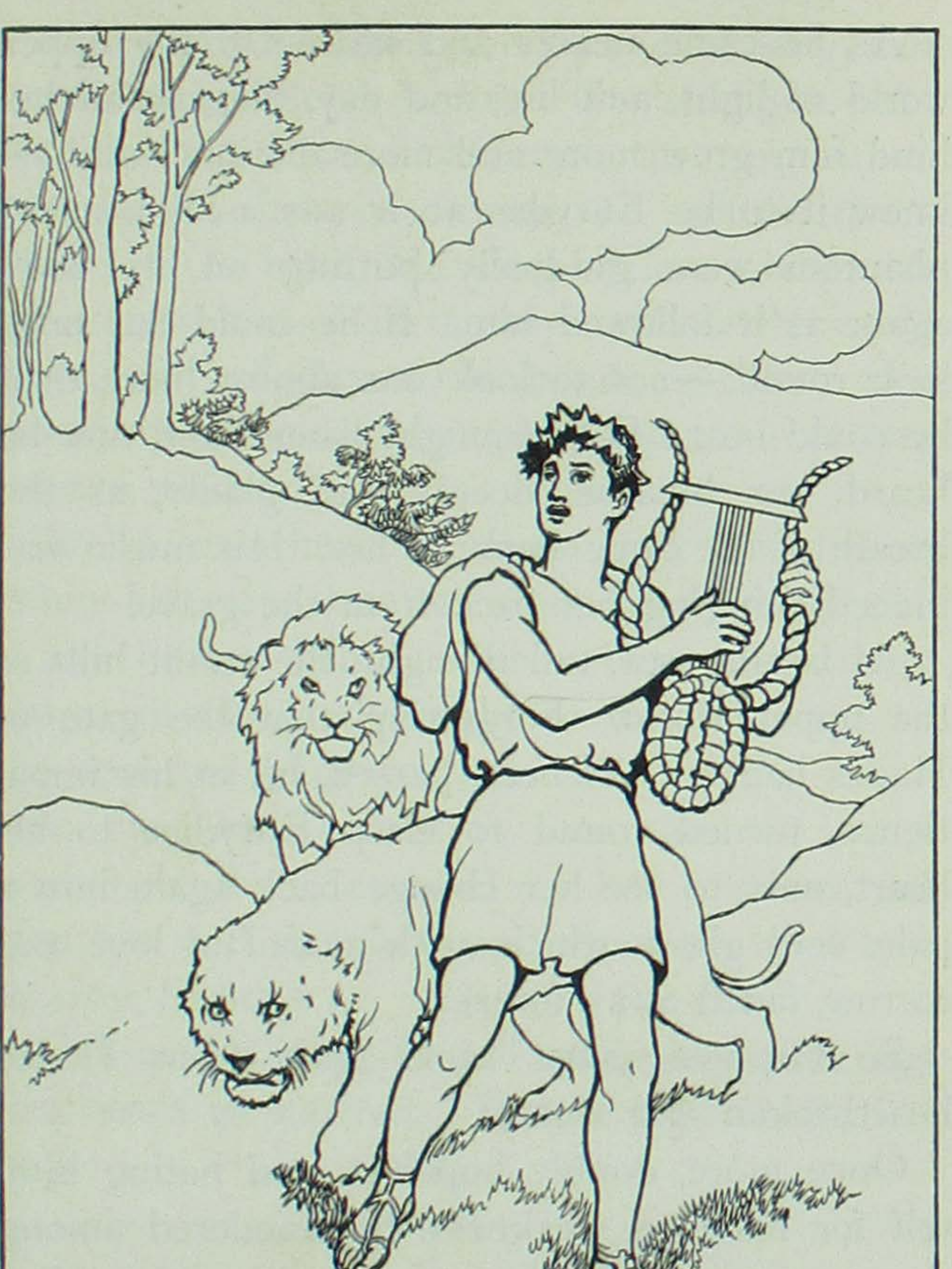
"You may have back your wife," she said; "but on one condition. You have conquered death; but that is not enough. You must conquer even love, for her sake. Go back to earth, playing and singing as you came, and Eurydice shall follow behind you. But if, until you pass the gate of Hades, you turn your head to look at her; if you give even a single glance behind you to see if she is there, then you shall never see her again."

You may think that Eurydice might have been given back to him without any conditions. But Hades was ruled by strict laws, which not even the king and queen could break; and nobody could be allowed to conquer death without showing that he could conquer temptation.

Orpheus was overjoyed. Singing a hymn of thanks, he went back the way he came; and presently he could hear a faint sound behind him, as if the whisper of a footfall were keeping pace with him.

Was it indeed Eurydice?

He longed to look round and see; but he remembered Proserpine's condition, and he did not let his eyes wander from the chink of daylight which presently began to gleam before him.



As he came nearer and nearer to the upper world of light, and life, and day, the footfall behind him grew more and more distinct, until he knew it to be Eurydice's: it was as if a silent phantom were gradually putting on its body again as it followed him. If he could but once look round — not to look was almost more than he could bear. But he might listen; and now he heard her breathe, deeply and gladly, as the breath of life came back to her. His music was indeed bringing her back from the grave.

At last he saw, full in sight, the sunlit hills of the upper world. Forgetting that the gate of Hades had not yet been passed, he, in his impatience, turned round to clasp Eurydice to his heart, only to see her change back again into a pale, cold ghost, which, with a wail of love and sorrow, faded away forever.

So Orpheus came back again from Hades heartbroken and alone.

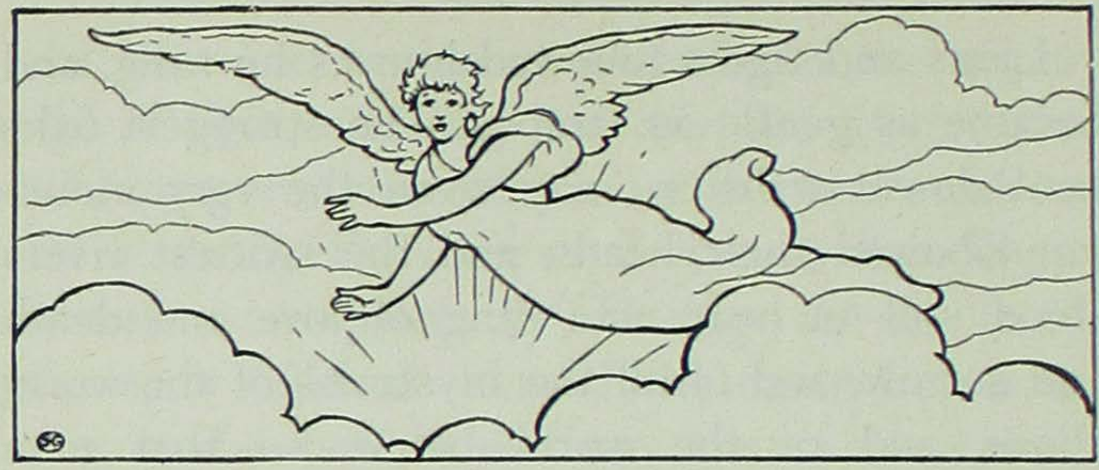
Once more, doubly hopeless, and hating himself for his own weakness, he wandered among the mountains and forests with his lyre. But while he was broken-hearted, his music became more wonderful than ever; for had he not seen with his eyes all the marvels of the underworld?

Lions and tigers followed him as he sang, and became as gentle as lambs. The strongest oaks bent down to listen; nay, even the very mountains bowed their heads, and the swiftest rivers stood still to hear. He sang of love and death and sorrow, and of all the mysteries of the world above, and of the world below, so that men looked upon him as a prophet, and came to him to learn wisdom.

But his own heart remained broken and dead within him. He had no more love left to give to any human being. The noblest and fairest women in the land sought to win him, but he was deaf and blind to them all.

So their love turned to hate; and at last a number of them, enraged by his coldness, fell upon him and slew him, and threw his head into the river Hebrus.

And, as his head floated away, the dead lips were heard to murmur, " Eurydice! Eurydice!"



CHAPTER XXIII

THE MAN WHO NEVER DIED

THERE was just one mortal who kept clear of Hades altogether. But whether he was really lucky in that or not, I must leave you to settle when you have heard his story.

If you have ever seen the sun rise, you have seen the wings of Aurora. Aurora is the dawn; and as she opens her wings you see all their colors: first, pale gray; then a delicate amber, which deepens into saffron; then the tint of a pink rose, which grows fuller and fuller till it becomes crimson and purple, and turns to gold when the chariot of the sun appears.

It is she who throws open the gates of the sky for Phœbus Apollo to start on his daily journey, just as it is Thetis who shuts them, and brings the twilight, when his journey is done.

Aurora is always glad and beautiful and young, just as she is shown in Guido's beautiful picture of her; she is always full of hope, because she closes her splendid wings and goes to sleep before the troubles of the day begin; and her only work is to feed the flowers with dew.

But once upon a time she fell in love with a mortal named Tithonus; and she promised to grant him whatever boon he most desired.

I suppose almost everybody has tried to think of what he would wish for if a goddess or fairy gave him such a chance.

Tithonus thought hard for a minute, and then said, "Great and beautiful goddess, my wish is that I may never die, so that I may see you every morning forever."

Now of course it was against all the laws of Hades that a mortal should never die, unless, of course, he was allowed to taste ambrosia, the food of the gods, which was very seldom allowed. How Aurora managed it, I cannot say, because I have never been told. But she kept her word somehow, and Tithonus got leave to live forever.

And so long as he was young and strong, and could get up early in the morning to look at the color of Aurora's wings, that was all very well. It did just as well as if he were to die in time, like other men.

But it happened at last that, while Aurora remained as young as ever, Tithonus began to get old. The promise of endless life did not prevent him from growing bald, and toothless, and liable to catch cold if he went out into the keen morning air.

By the time that he was a hundred years old, he became tired of getting up to see the sun rise day after day.

At two hundred he felt like a bundle of aches and pains, and he liked a doze in the sun better than a thousand Auroras.

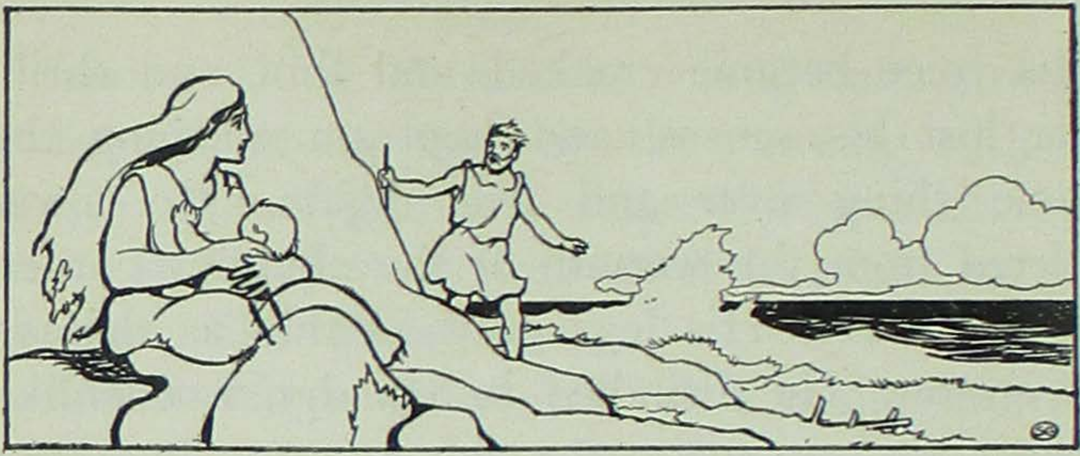
At three hundred he became tired of living, and wanted to be able to creep into some quiet corner of Hades, drink a cup of water from the river of Lethe, and go to sleep and think of nothing. But he could not; for though racked with pain and weary of life, he could not die.

He could only shrink and shrivel, till, after many hundreds of years, he was less than two inches long. His skin turned dry and brown.

His voice became cracked, and thin, and shrill. He lost his senses, and kept on chirping the same thing over and over again. He never stirred from the warmth of the chimney corner, night or day. His legs grew as thin as threads of cotton. He dwindled into a dry, woodenlike insect.

In short, he became a *cricket.*

And such he remains to this day. But Aurora is as young and as beautiful and as fresh as ever, and has clean forgotten him; while he spends his life in trying to be merry, and in chirping, "Oh, how I want to die!"



CHAPTER XXIV

THE ADVENTURES OF PERSEUS

ONCE upon a time there was a king of Argos, in Greece, to whom it had been foretold that he would be slain by his daughter's son. This troubled him greatly. So he built a high tower of brass, and imprisoned his daughter Danaë in the highest room.

Having furnished her with provisions and amusements to last her all her life, he closed up all the entrances, so that nobody could get into the tower, and set guards all round it, so that nobody could even come near it. He did all this so that she should never marry and have a son who would grow up to kill him.

You may imagine what sort of life Danaë led, shut up in the brazen tower. She was made comfortable enough, and had plenty to eat and drink, and musical instruments, and pictures, and jewels, and all such things; but she never, from year's end to year's end, saw a face, except when she looked into the looking-glass, nor heard a voice but when she sang to herself, which she soon got tired of doing.

She could not even look out of the window, because there were no windows to look from. She lived by lamplight, and she knew that this was to be her life for all the rest of her days.

Her father felt safe and satisfied, and thought he had baffled fate cleverly indeed.

And thus things went on for many years (what endless years they must have been to the imprisoned princess!), till one day she heard a little chinking noise, as if a gold coin had fallen on the brazen floor of her room. She did not, however, pay any particular heed; indeed, she must by that time have got used to all sorts of queer fancies. But presently she heard it again. And, looking down in an idle way, sure enough, she saw a couple of gold coins lying on the floor.

That seemed rather odd, for whence could they have come? Then a third coin joined the two others, and, raising her eyes to the ceiling, she saw coin after coin coming through a crack so small that she had not known till now that it was there. Faster and faster came the coins, till they became a shower, and the heap of gold on the floor stood higher than her head. Then the shower ceased, and the crack was still so small that she could not see whence the coins had fallen.

As she stood wondering, the heap began to stir itself; the gold pieces melted into a single mass, which gradually seemed to take life and form. At last, where the gold had been, she saw the form of a man, but so stately and royal, and so much grander and nobler than any mere man could be, that she fell on her knees before him.

"I am Jupiter," he said, raising her, "and I have chosen you to be my earthly bride."

So just that little crack in the ceiling, only just big enough for a thin gold coin to squeeze through, brought about what the father of Danaë had been at such trouble to prevent. And in time the news came to the king that a child had been heard crying in the brazen tower. He broke his way in, hurried up the staircase to the highest room, and there, to his rage and terror, he found Danaë with a child, a boy, in her arms.

But he was determined not to let fate conquer him. He could not very well have his daughter and grandson put to death, at least openly. But he had them carried out to sea and then turned adrift in a small leaky boat without sail, oars, or rudder, so that they were certain to be drowned. This having been done, the king felt happy and comfortable again.

Now there lived on a little island, more than two hundred miles away, an honest fisherman named Dictys. It is often rough weather about there, and bad for fishing; but he was a brave and skillful sailor, and the weather had to be rough indeed to keep him ashore.

You may think, therefore, how bad the weather was when, for the first time in his life, he was unable to cast his nets for many days and nights together, so many that he began to wonder what in the world he should do to get food for his wife and children. He used to lie awake listening to the howling wind and roaring sea, and then sought for food among the rocks and pools, thinking himself lucky if he could find a damaged crab or a bunch of eatable seaweed.

One morning while he was searching about with a heavy heart, he passed a jutting rock and came suddenly on a young and handsome woman, in clothes all torn and drenched by the waves, sitting with a baby in her lap, and forlornly rocking herself to and fro. Hard by were the broken timbers of a boat, which had doubtless been blown ashore by the wind.

Dictys questioned her kindly, but she could not or would not answer; so, taking her by the hand, he led her to his cottage, where his wife, who was as good-hearted as he, made a big fire of driftwood, and gave the mother and child a share of what food they had left, though it could ill be spared.

From their famished looks he judged that they must have been tossing about on the waves for many days. But though the woman thanked him gratefully, with tears in her eyes, she did not tell him anything of her story except what he could observe for himself, that she had been lost at sea.

" Perhaps she has lost her memory," he said to his wife, when their guests were sleeping, worn out with all they had gone through. " What is to be done? We do not even know who they are."

"And look at their clothes," said his wife. "For all their being in rags, they might have been made for a queen and a queen's son. But whoever they are," she said with a sigh, "we can't let them perish of hunger and cold. I never saw such a beautiful child, not even among our own."

Dictys sighed still more deeply, for to be burdened with two more mouths to feed in those bad times was a serious thing, even though his heart also bled for the misery of the mother and the beauty of the boy.

"I have it, wife!" he exclaimed at last. "As soon as they are rested, and as I have nothing else to do, worse luck, I 'll take them to the king. He 'll do something for them, I 'm sure. And if he does n't, why, we must do what we can, that 's all, and hope for better times."

So when the mother and child were quite rested and refreshed, Dictys set off with them for the king's palace, doing his best to cheer them by the way. The island was a little one, not more than a dozen miles round, so they had not to go far, and fortunately they found the king at home.

The king's name was Polydectes. Having heard the fisherman's story, and being struck with the beauty and highborn air both of the woman and of the child, he kept them in his palace, treated them as guests whom he delighted to honor, and was much too polite to ask questions.

The mother told nobody anything except that her child's name was Perseus, and hers Danaë.

Perseus grew up into such splendid manhood that for a long time Polydectes was fond and proud of him, and treated him as if he were his own son. He was strong and handsome, brave, noble-minded, and marvelously accomplished both in mind and in body. He was devoted to his mother; and he could never do enough to show his gratitude to Dictys the fisherman, who had been kind to her in her need.

But his very virtues became his misfortune. Polydectes gradually became jealous of him, for he could not help seeing that the people of the island loved and honored Perseus more than the king himself, and he was afraid that they might rebel and make Perseus their king.

Besides, he wanted to have Danaë in his power and without a protector, so that he might marry her against her will. Therefore he bethought him of a plot by which he could get rid of Perseus forever in a seemingly honorable way.

So one day he called the young man to him, and said, "Perseus, I know how brave you are, and how fond of all sorts of difficult adventures. Did you ever hear of the Gorgons? Well, the Gorgons are three terrible demon sisters who live in the middle of Africa. Their bodies are covered with scales like dragons, which no spear can pierce; their hands are brazen claws; they have snakes instead of hair; and they have teeth as long as the tusks of a wild boar. Whoever looks on them is turned to stone. All three are dreadful; but the one who is named Medusa is the most dreadful of all. Now I have been thinking, as you are so fond of adventures, you might go and cut off Medusa's head. It would be something to be proud of for the rest of your days."

Perseus was rather taken aback by such an errand. In the first place, he did not know where to find the Gorgons; in the second place, how was he to kill a creature who would turn him into stone by one glance of her eyes? But he was much too brave to refuse, or even to think of refusing.

"I will just bid my mother good-by, and then I will start at once."

He did not tell his mother what he had undertaken to do, for fear of alarming her; but he said good-by to her as cheerfully as if he were only going for a night's fishing with their friend the fisherman. Then, having asked Dictys to take care of his mother till he came back again, he lay down to get a little sleep before starting.

He had a curious dream. He thought that Pluto, Minerva, and Mercury came to his bedside, and that each made him a parting present. Pluto gave him a helmet, Minerva a shield, and Mercury a pair of sandals, with little wings fastened to them, and a curious weapon, of which the blade was shaped like a scythe, and made of a single diamond.

But the dream was not so strange as what he found when he woke. There, on his bed, actually lay the helmet, the shield of polished steel, the winged sandals, and the scythe-shaped dagger.

Well, somebody must have put them there. Perhaps they were parting gifts from King Polydectes. So first he put on the helmet; then he placed the weapon in his belt; then he slung the shield over his shoulders; last of all, he bound the winged sandals on his feet, and when the wings spread themselves at his heels, and carried him high up into the air, he began to think that the visit of the gods must have been something more than a dream.

He went up so high that the earth looked like a large map spread out below him, on which the island seemed but a mere speck in the sea over which he was drifting southward. After many hours of this strange sort of travel, he began to descend, and came down upon his feet in the middle of a hot sandy plain, where neither hill nor tree nor water was to be seen.

He could not tell where he was. But he did not lose courage; and he set out across the desert, knowing that if he kept straight on in one direction, he must reach somewhere or other.

But not till nearly nightfall did he see, in the far distance, a cluster of palm trees, the sure sign of water, which his long journey over the hot and glaring sand, under the blazing sun, had made him need sorely.

Reaching the palm trees at last, he found, in the midst of the cluster, a wooden hut. Wondering that anybody should live in such a place, but hoping to find food and guidance, he knocked boldly on the door with the hilt of his sword, and was bidden, by a hoarse, cracked voice, to come in.

He entered, and found three old women warming their hands at a few burning sticks, although it was so hot in the desert that Perseus could hardly bear the weight of his shield. As he came in, the three crones turned their faces toward him; and he saw that one of them had only one eye and no tooth, that another had only one tooth and no eye, and that the third had neither tooth nor eye.

"I am a traveler," said Perseus, "and have lost my way. Will you kindly tell me where I am?"

"Come in and show yourself," said the crone who had the eye, sharply. "I must see who you are before I answer," she added, though her one eye was looking straight at him all the while.

"Here I am," said Perseus, stepping into the middle of the room. "I suppose you can see me now."

"It's very strange, very strange," said the old woman. "Sisters, I hear a man's voice, but I see no man."

"Nonsense, sister!" said the one who had the tooth. "You can't have put the eye in right. Let me try."

To the amazement of Perseus, the first old woman took out her eye and passed it to the second, who, after giving it a polish, put it into her own face and looked round; but she also saw nothing.

The two wrangled for a while as to whether there was anything to be seen; and then the eye was passed round to the third sister. But she also failed to see Perseus, though the eye rolled in her head and glowed like a live coal.

And so they kept passing the eye round from one to another, and yet nothing could they see.

At last Perseus, feeling terribly hot and tired, took off Pluto's helmet to cool himself, when suddenly, the old woman who, at the moment, happened to be using the eye exclaimed, "There he is. I see him now."

Then Perseus found out that his helmet made him invisible when he put it on; and he had already found out the use of his sandals. Perhaps the other gifts would have their uses too.

He let the old women have a good look at him each in turn, and then said, "I am hungry and thirsty and tired, and don't know where I am. Will you give me a little food, and tell me who such kind ladies are, and what this place is, and put me on the right road to where I want to go?"

It was the one who happened to have the eye in her head that always spoke.

"We will give you some food," she said, "for you seem a well-behaved young man. This remote barren place to which you have come is the great desert of Libya. And as for us, we are three sisters, called the 'Gray Women.' Where do you want to go?"

"I want to visit those terrible creatures, the Gorgons, and particularly Medusa, the most terrible of all. Do you happen to know where they are?"

"Of course we know, for they are our own kinswomen. But never, no, never, will we tell you where they live, or the way to get there. Never will we let so handsome a youth be turned into stone."

"Never," croaked the old woman with the tooth.

"Never," mumbled the third.

Perseus did all he could to persuade them, but they were so stubborn that he was only wasting words.

Meanwhile they laid out supper, which they ate in a very strange way, each taking her turn with the one tooth which they had among them, and passing it round from one to the other, just as they did with their only eye. This made the meal rather long and slow, for they ate enormously.

After supper they put the eye and the tooth into a little box while they took a nap, when Perseus, watching his opportunity, snatched up the box, put on his helmet, and cried out, "Now tell me the way to Medusa, or else you shall never see or eat again."

All three of the women went down on their knees, and implored him to give them back their only tooth and their only eye.

But he said, "It is my turn to be stubborn. Tell me where to find Medusa, and you shall have them back; but not a minute before."

"I suppose we must, then," said the eldest, with a sigh. "Well, it won't be our fault now, whatever happens. And after all, it 's better that you should be turned into stone than that we should be blind and starved."

"Much better," her sisters groaned.

"Very well, then," said the eldest, "you must go straight on, night and day, until you come into the country of King Atlas, which is called Mauretania. Near the king's palace is a garden where the trees bear golden apples, guarded by a dragon. If the dragon does not devour you, you must pass the garden gate, and go on, a long, long way, till you come to a great lake where, if you do not find the Gorgons, you will be a lucky man."

Perseus gave the old women back their tooth and eye, which they received with joy, and thanking them for their information, left the hut and traveled on.

After many days and nights, during which he found it hard to obtain food, he came into a fertile country wherein stood a stately palace, so high that it seemed to touch the clouds. Hard by was a vast garden inclosed by a high wall, and at the gate, sure enough, sat a monstrous dragon with glaring eyes.

But Perseus, wearing his invisible helmet, passed by safely, because unseen.

In time he came to the lake, where he took off his helmet to quench his thirst. While he was drinking, he was startled by the approach of what sounded like a mighty rush of wind, and he had but just time to put on his helmet again before he saw, reflected in the lake, the flying form of the terrible Medusa, the Gorgon whom he had vowed to slay, and who, not seeing him, sat down beside him with folded wings.

Well was it for Perseus that he remembered what would happen to him if he looked at Medusa. And yet how in the world was he to fight her without looking at her?

Suddenly he bethought himself of Minerva's shield, which was polished like a mirror. He turned it toward Medusa, and saw, not herself indeed, but her reflection in the polished shield, which did just as well.

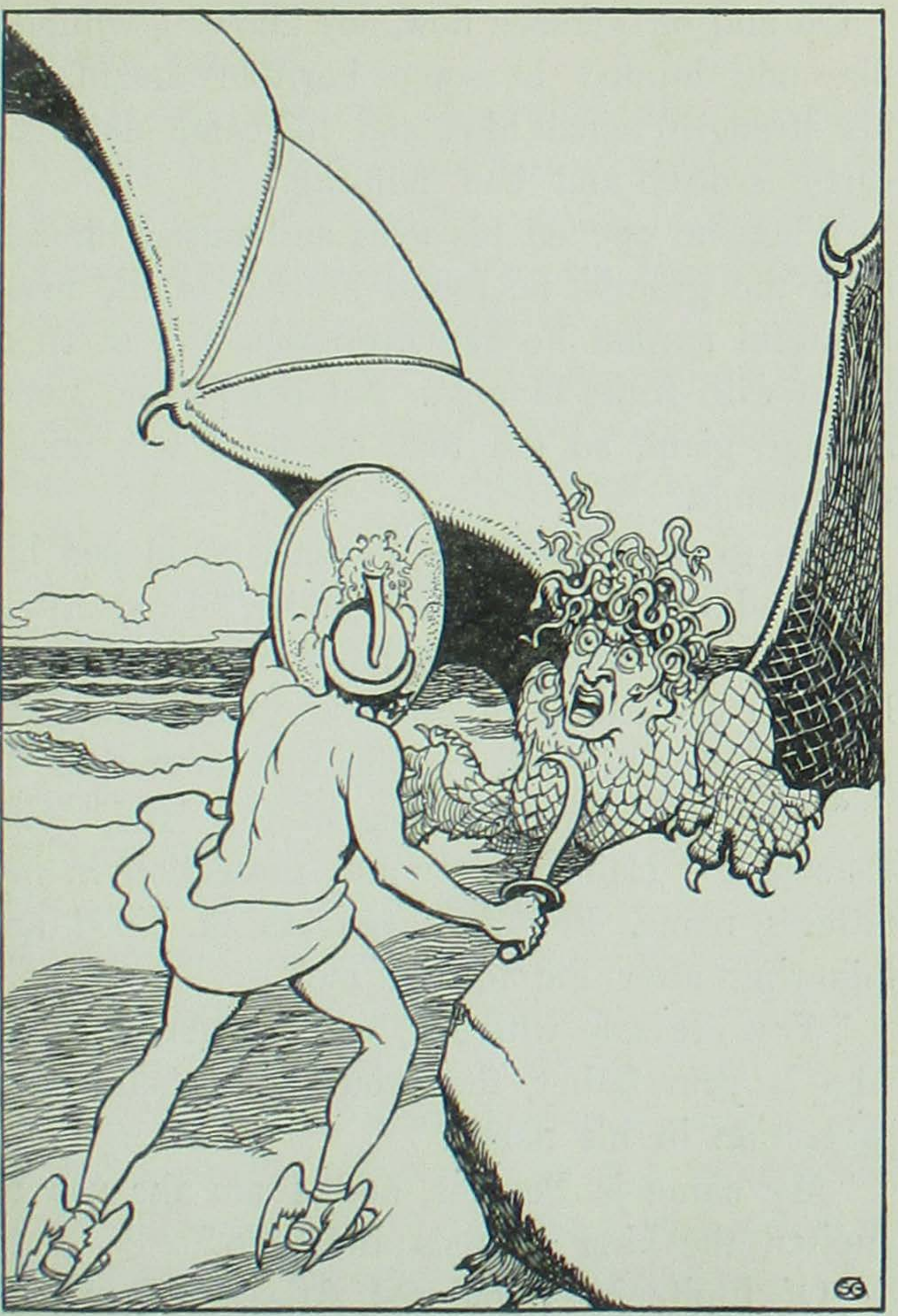
She was indeed a monster, more terrible even than he had expected. She was of gigantic size, hideous and cruel in face, with the scales and wings of a dragon, horrible claws, and hundreds of writhing and hissing snakes on her head instead of hair. No wonder that anybody who looked on her was turned at once into stone.

Perseus, wearing his helmet, and guiding himself by his mirror, from which he never moved his eyes, drew his diamond blade, sprang upon the monster, gave one stroke just between her chin and where her scales began, and, in a single moment, her hideous head was rolling on the sand. The snakes gave one last hiss, and the deed was done.

Still keeping his eyes turned away, Perseus, by using his mirror, found the head, which he slung out of his sight behind him. Scarcely had he done this when he heard again the sound of wings, like a great wind: the sisters of Medusa, the other two grim Gorgons, were flying over the lake like hurricanes to take vengeance on her slayer.

They could not see Perseus himself, because of his helmet; but they saw their sister's head on his back, and could thus swoop down upon him. But Perseus, remembering his winged sandals, had nothing to do but spring up into the air, and off he flew, with the raging Gorgons after him.

It was a terrible race. Perseus would not throw away the head, though it left such a track behind him. For from one of the splashes of blood which fell on the earth sprang up a giant armed with a golden sword; from another leaped into life the winged horse Pegasus, who immediately darted off through the air and never stopped until he alighted among the Muses upon Mount Helicon; the smaller drops of blood as they fell became countless serpents, and all manner of loathsome crawling things.



On and on Perseus flew, not knowing whither, like one hunted in some horrible dream, till his strength failed him, and he came down to earth, swiftly and half fainting.

When he opened his eyes and raised himself from the ground, he found himself in the most beautiful garden he had ever seen, full of trees laden with fruits of gold. But before him stood a huge giant, so tall that his head was above the clouds.

The giant stooped till Perseus could see his face, and said in a voice of thunder, "I am Atlas, King of Mauretania. How has a miserable pygmy like you passed the dragon who guards the gate of the garden of golden apples, and entered in?"

"Then from you, as king of this land," said Perseus, "I claim shelter and protection in my father's name. For the avengers of blood are following after me to kill me."

"You are safe with me," replied Atlas. "But who is your father, that you claim shelter and protection in his name?"

"My name is Perseus, and I am the son of Jupiter, the king of gods and men."

"Of Jupiter?" thundered Atlas. "Then prepare to die."

"You would kill a son of Jupiter?" asked Perseus, amazed.

"Ay, and any son of Jupiter who comes in my way. For hath it not been foretold that by a son of Jupiter I shall be robbed of my golden apples? For what else are you here? Son of Jupiter, once more, prepare to die."

And so saying, he lifted his enormous arm, one blow of which would have swept away ten thousand men as if they had been but a swarm of flies.

Perseus gave himself up for lost, for he had no more chance against Atlas than a beetle would have against an elephant. However, like a brave knight, he resolved to die fighting: he drew his sword and grasped his shield, at least what he thought to be his shield; for it chanced to be Medusa's head which he brought from behind his shoulder and held up before the giant.

Down came the huge right arm of Atlas to crush him. But even in death the head did its work. No sooner were Medusa's staring eyes turned upon the giant than all in a moment his limbs stiffened, and he became a vast mountain of stone, with its head above the clouds. And there stands Mount Atlas to this day.

Thankful for his wonderful escape, Perseus, without taking a single golden apple, continued his journey, no longer pursued by the Gorgons, who had doubtless lost trace of him. Leaving Mauretania, he recrossed the great desert of Libya and traveled on and on until he reached the coast of Æthiopia, and entered a great city on the seashore.

But though the place was evidently great and rich, the whole air seemed full of sadness and gloom. The people went about silent and sighing, and altogether so woebegone that they had no attention to spare for a stranger. When he reached the king's palace, the signs of mourning were deeper still: it was like entering a tomb, all was so plunged in speechless sorrow.

"What can be the matter?" asked Perseus at last, seizing a passing servant by the arm, and compelling him to listen. "Is it the death of the king?"

"Ah, if it were only that!" moaned the man. "But no; King Cepheus is alive and well. Alas, and woe is me." And so once more he fell to wailing, and passed on.

Thus over and over again Perseus vainly sought an answer, getting nothing but tears and groans. And so, none heeding him, he went on till he reached a chamber where sat the king himself in the midst of his court; and here was the deepest mourning of all.

"I perceive you are a stranger," said King Cepheus. "Pardon us if we have seemed inhospitable and unlike the Æthiopians, the friends of the gods; it is not our way. But," he continued, the tears flowing as he spoke, "if you knew, you would understand."

"Let me know," said Perseus gently, for he was filled with pity for the king's tears.

"My own daughter, the Princess Andromeda," answered the king, "is condemned to a horrible death; I know not whether she is yet alive."

"How," asked Perseus, "can a king's daughter be condemned to death against her father's will?"

"No wonder that it sounds strange," answered Cepheus; "but listen: Andromeda is my only child. For some reason, I know not what, the gods have permitted the land to be ravaged by a monster which came out of the sea, whose very breath is a blight and a pestilence, and which spares neither man, woman, nor child. Not one of us is left without cause to mourn. Fearing the destruction of all my people, I asked of the great oracle of the Egyptians in what way the work of the monster could be stayed. Alas! the oracle declared that nothing would avail but delivering up Andromeda herself to its fury to be devoured. What could I do? Could I doom all my people to lose all their children for the sake of my own? There was but one thing for a king, who is the father of all his people, to do: and even now —"

But he could say no more.

"Oracle or no oracle," cried Perseus, "it shall not be while I am alive. Where is the princess?"

"She was chained at sunrise to a rock on the seashore, there to wait for the monster. But where she is now —"

Perseus did not wait for another word, but, leaving the palace, hurried along the shore, already half covered by the rising tide, helping himself over the difficult places by the wings at his heels.

At last he came to what made his heart beat and burn with pity and rage. Chained by her wrists to a pillar of rock was the most beautiful of all princesses, covered only by the long hair that fell over her shoulders, and by the rising waves, which were already nearly waist-high.

But what struck Perseus most was her look of quiet courage and noble pride, the look of one who was devoting herself to a cruel death for her country's sake, that others might be saved.

The whole heart of Perseus went out to her: he vowed, if he could not save her, to share her doom. But before he could reach her side, a huge black wave parted, and forth came the monster, a creature like nothing else of land or sea, with a bloated, shapeless body, studded with hungry, cruel eyes, and hundreds of long, slimy limbs, twisting and crawling, each with a yawning mouth, from which streamed livid fire and horrible fumes.

Andromeda turned pale as the loathsome creature came on with a slowness more dreadful than speed.

Perseus could not wait. Springing from the rock with his wings, he threw himself, like lightning, full upon the monster, and then began such a struggle as had never been seen before. The creature twined its limbs round Perseus, and tried to crush him. As soon as Perseus tore himself from one, he was clutched by another, while the pulpy mass seemed proof against thrusts or blows.

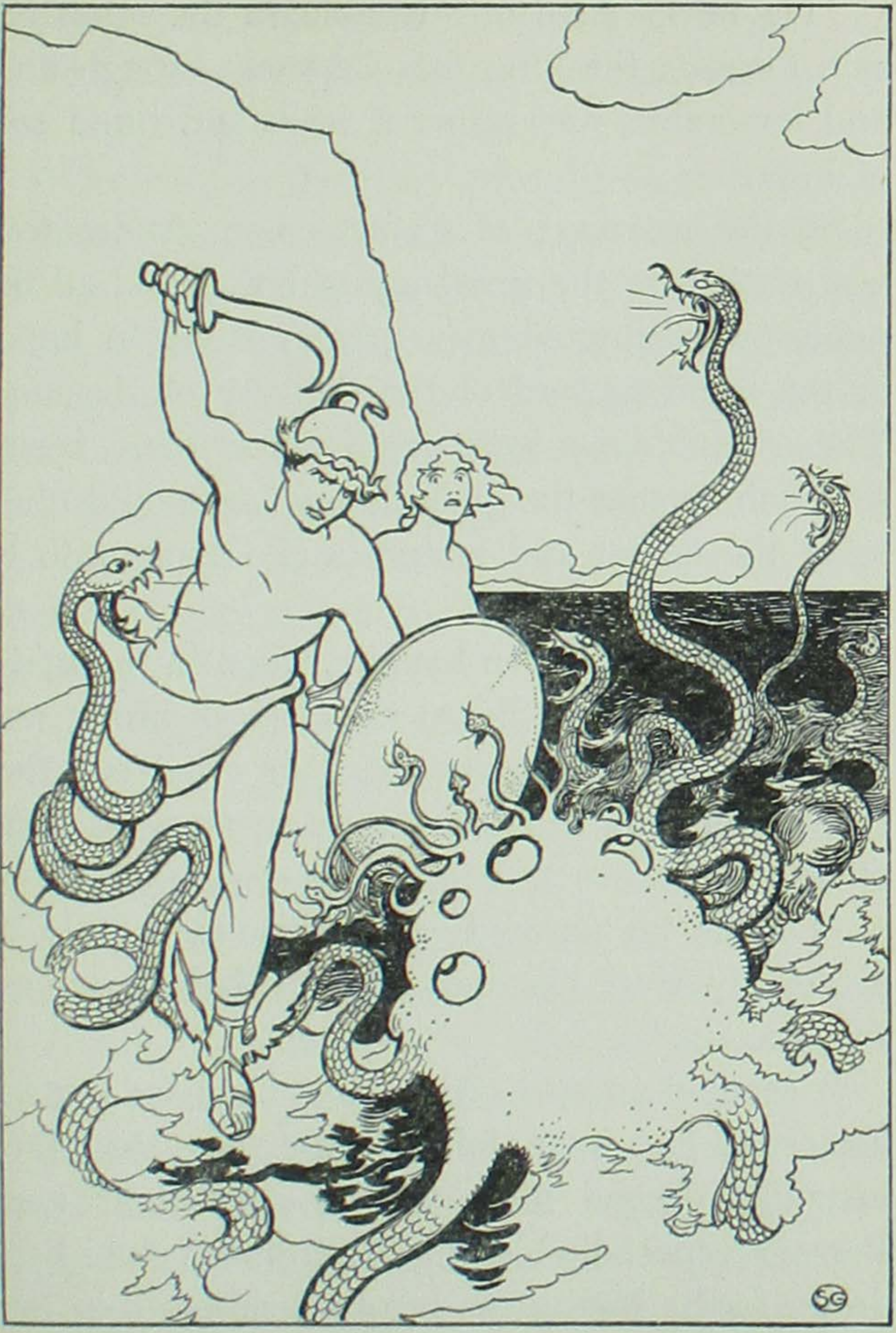
Perseus felt his life passing from him; he put all the strength left him into one last blow. It fell on the monster's right shoulder. But that was the one place where it could be pierced. The coils relaxed, and Perseus, to his own amazement, saw the monster floating, a shapeless corpse, on the waves.

Having released Andromeda, who had watched the struggle in an agony of dread for what had seemed the certain fate of her champion, he carried her back through the air to her father's palace; and I need not tell how the mourning turned into wonder and joy.

"What can I do to show my gratitude?" said Cepheus to Perseus. "Ask of me whatever you will, and it shall be yours, on the word of a king."

"Give me Andromeda to be my wife," said Perseus. "That is all I want in the world."

"Gladly," said Cepheus; but suddenly he became grave. "I have promised on the word of a king, which cannot be broken. But I must warn you that you are not the first in the field. Andromeda has long been claimed in marriage by the powerful Prince Phineus: and he is not the man to lose what he wants without giving trouble."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"He never gave any trouble to the monster," said Perseus, thinking that Cepheus, though kind and honorable, was rather a weak and timid sort of king.

So the marriage of Perseus and Andromeda was settled, to the great joy of both; and all the nobles were invited to a great festival in honor of the wedding, and of the delivery of the land. The Æthiopians were famous for their feasts, so much so that the gods themselves would often leave the nectar and ambrosia of Olympus to be guests at their tables.

Everything went on happily, when in the midst of the banquet was heard the clash of arms; and those who were nearest the door cried out that Prince Phineus had come with an army to carry off the bride.

"Do not be alarmed," said Perseus. "Only let everybody shut his eyes until I bid him open them again."

It seemed an odd order; but Cepheus and all his court had such faith in Perseus that they instantly obeyed him, and all shut their eyes. Perseus, especially bidding Andromeda close hers, drew forth Medusa's head, turning the face toward the door. And when, at his bidding, Cepheus and the rest opened their eyes and looked, they saw Phineus and his army all turned into statues of stone.

After resting from his adventures at the court of King Cepheus, Perseus set sail with Andromeda, in one of the king's ships, for his island home, where they arrived after a safe and pleasant voyage. He was impatient to see his mother again, and to show King Polydectes how well he had done his errand. On reaching the island, he left Andromeda in the ship, while he went alone on shore to see how things had gone while he had been away.

His way to the palace led him past the temple of Minerva, at the gate of which he found great confusion. Forcing his way through the crowd, he entered, and was astonished to see his mother, Danaë, crouching in terror by the altar, with Dictys the fisherman standing before her, and defending her from King Polydectes and his guards, who were crowding the temple.

Clearing his way to the altar steps, Perseus heard from Dictys what was happening: how King Polydectes, taking advantage of his absence, had been persecuting Danaë to marry him against her will, and had at last driven her into the temple to make her his wife by force. Dictys alone had come to her rescue; but what could one man do against the king and all his guards?

"And now you have come," sighed Dictys, "you will be slain too. See, they are coming on."

"You sent me to slay Medusa, the most terrible of the Gorgons," cried Perseus to King Polydectes. "See how well I have obeyed you."

So saying, he held up the fatal head; and the king and his guards forthwith became stone. Thus was Polydectes destroyed by his own treachery.

The people desired to make Perseus king; but he had a longing to pay a visit to the land of Argos, where he had been born, but which he had never seen. So he made Dictys the fisherman king of the island, thinking that kindness, courage, and faithfulness were the chief things to be looked for in the choice of a ruler, and set sail for Argos with his wife and mother.

Of course nobody there knew any of them; for Perseus had left the country when a child in arms, and Danaë had spent her girlhood shut up in a brazen tower.

It so happened that, when they reached land, the people were celebrating some solemn games in honor of their king, who had just died: wrestling, racing, and so forth. And Perseus, hearing the news, went round to take part in them.

Having shown himself best in every sport, he joined in a game of quoits, in which, as always, he found himself without a rival. Having outdone all others, he thought he would outdo even himself; and, taking up the heaviest quoit, he cast it so far that it passed over the heads of the circle of spectators, so that none could see where it fell.

Suddenly they were startled by a cry which made the people crowd to where an old man had fallen from his seat, and now lay dead on the ground. The quoit had struck him on the head.

"Fly," cried those who stood about Perseus. "It is the king of Argos, whom your unlucky quoit has killed."

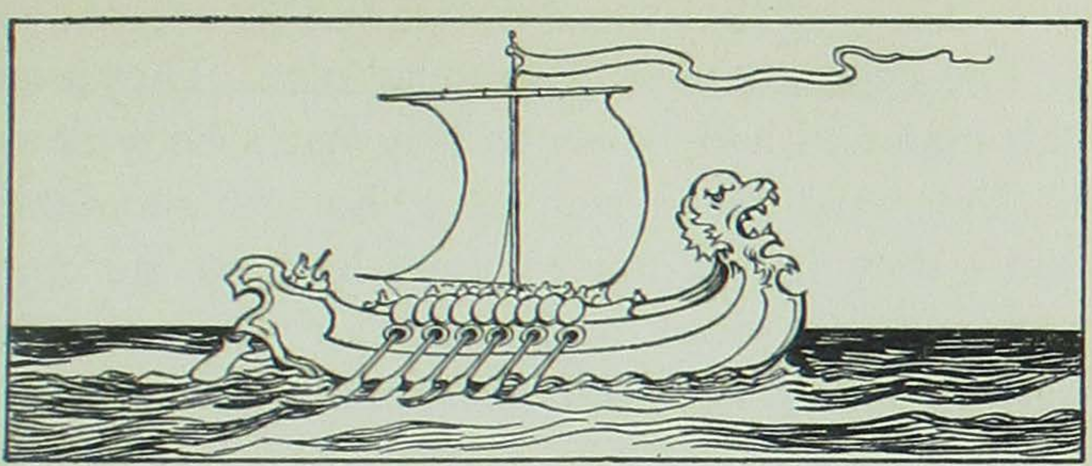
And thus came to pass what had been foretold at the beginning: the king of Argos had been slain by his daughter's son.

As for Perseus, whose adventures were now at an end, he refused the kingdom of Argos, which had come to him in such an unfortunate manner, and, traveling farther into Greece, built a city and made a kingdom for himself, which he called

Mycenæ. Here, with Andromeda and Danaë, he lived in peace and happiness, ruling so well and wisely that when he died he was made a demigod, and admitted into Olympus. There are two constellations which are still called Perseus and Andromeda.

The Gorgon's head he consecrated to Minerva, who fixed it in the middle of her shield, where it still retained its power of turning the enemies of the goddess of wisdom into blocks of stone.

I suspect that one part of this story has reminded you of how St. George of England, one of the Seven Champions of Christendom, rescued the Princess Sabra from the dragon. Well, there is this great likeness among all good knights, that they have the help of Heaven, because they would be equally good and brave whether they had such help or no.



CHAPTER XXV

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

WHEN Æson, who was a king in northern Greece, began to grow old, he left his kingdom to his infant son, Jason. But Pelias, Jason's uncle, who was to rule until the boy became of age, wanted the kingdom for himself, and consulted an oracle as to what he should do to make himself secure.

The answer was strange: "Fear nobody who cometh not with and without a shoe."

"There is nothing very alarming about that," thought Pelias; so, instead of having Jason killed, as he had first thought of doing, he sent the child a long way off into Thessaly, among the people called centaurs, hoping that he should never hear of him again.

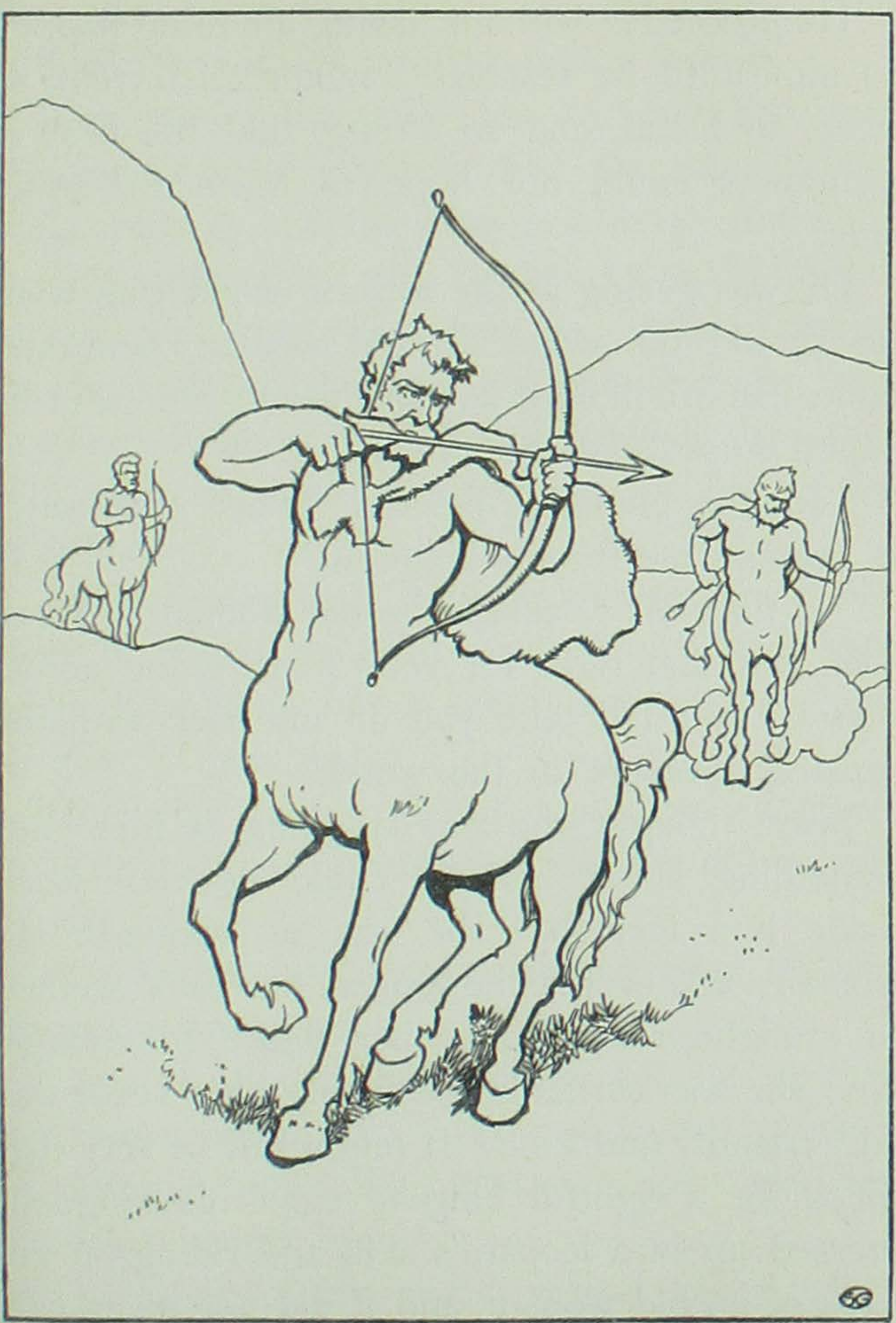
The centaurs were a singular race. They were half man and half horse, as if a man's body down to the waist were set on a horse's shoulders. Thus they had a horse's four legs for running, and a man's head and arms for thinking and fighting: they were famous archers, very learned, and very brave.

Their most famous chief was Chiron, who, besides being their best archer, was also a great philosopher and physician. Chiron, pleased with Jason's quickness, became his teacher, so that the young prince grew up skilled both in all manly exercises and in every branch of human knowledge.

When Jason had become a man, the centaur thought it only right that he should know his birth and parentage, and should have a chance of regaining his father's throne, since he was so fit to be a king.

But Chiron first consulted the oracle, which gave to him as strange an answer as it had given to Pelias: "Who seeks a crown shall wear the leopard's hide."

So Jason, by Chiron's counsel, went out hunting, and, having killed a leopard, dressed himself in its skin. Then he set out, on foot and alone, for home.



He proceeded without having anything happen to him, until he reached a mountain torrent, so deep, so broad, and so strong, that the best of swimmers could not hope to reach the other side.

He was gazing at the torrent, wondering what he should do, when an old woman, bent and lame, came hobbling by, and asked him why he stared so sadly at the stream.

" Reason enough," he said, " when that water is keeping me from a kingdom."

" Is that all ? " asked the old woman ; " I can soon put that right for you. I am going across myself ; and I 'll take you on my back with the greatest pleasure in the world."

Jason thought she was laughing at him. But something about her, he could not tell what, made him feel that she was no common old woman ; and even as he looked, her back seemed to straighten itself, and her figure to enlarge. No ; she was certainly not joking : her smile was only friendly and kind. It might not be very dignified for a rightful king to enter his kingdom dressed up in a leopard's skin and riding on the back of an old woman, and it did not seem safe, either. However, as there was nothing else to be done, he got on the back of the old woman, who at once stepped out into the raging stream.

How strong the flood was he could tell from the forest trees which it had torn up by the roots and was carrying away headlong. But while Jason's brain reeled with the whirl, the old woman remained as steady as a rock, and strode through the deepest and roughest places with ease. In a wonderfully short time Jason reached the other side, with no worse mishap than the loss of his left shoe.

"Never mind that," said the old woman. "The river is bound to have something. You have given it nothing but a shoe; most people have to give it their lives."

"But what do you give it then?" asked Jason.

"Oh, the gods go toll-free," said the old woman. "I am Juno."

And before Jason had recovered from his surprise, she was gone.

Jason continued his journey till he reached his home, where the oddity of a man dressed in nothing but a leopard's skin soon gathered a crowd round him.

The news of the sight spread about till it reached the ears of King Pelias himself, who came out of his palace to discover what was going on. But as soon as he caught sight of the stranger in the leopard's skin, he started with dismay. There stood a man with a shoe and without a shoe: just what the oracle had warned him to fear.

Seeing that it was the king, Jason at once went up to him, and said, "I am Jason, the son of Æson. Give up to me this kingdom, which is rightfully mine."

His boldness and his royal bearing had a great effect on the people, who hated Pelias and were glad to welcome back the rightful heir. They set up a great shout for Jason, which alarmed Pelias still more; and many of them pressed forward with drawn swords.

But Pelias, if he had not much courage, had plenty of craft. And so he answered, after a moment's thought, "Why, of course you shall have what is your own. Do you think I want to rob you or keep for a single day what is not mine? I am only too glad to welcome you, my dear nephew, home again. I have been wondering what had become of you, and not till after long searching did I give you up for lost. I think you will find that I have taken good care of your kingdom while you have been away. I deserve some credit for having had all the hard work, while you, no doubt, have been going about and amusing yourself. I am very glad to see you; indeed I am."

Jason was rather surprised to find everything so easy, and his uncle so friendly. Indeed, he hardly knew what to say.

"I am only eager to enter on my duties," he said at last; "and I shall look to you to help me to govern well."

"That is the right spirit," said Pelias. "So I will tell you the first of your duties; one that I rejoice to give over to better and younger hands than mine. It is difficult and even dangerous —"

"All the better," said Jason. "It will bring all the more glory."

"You are an admirable young man. Well, you must know that many generations ago King Athamas of Thebes married a princess named Nephele, and had two children, Phryxus and Helle. Nephele going mad, he divorced her, and married the princess Ino, and had two children more. Ino hated Nephele's children, because they stood in the way of her own. So, being a witch, she desolated Thebes by a plague, and got a false oracle to declare that the plague should never cease so long as Phryxus and Helle were alive. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Jason. "Except that I don't see what all this old family history has to do with me."

"Patience, and you will see," said Pelias. "Just as Phryxus and his sister Helle were about to be offered in sacrifice, that the gods might be persuaded to take away the plague, a winged ram, with a fleece of pure gold, came out of the sea, took the brother and sister on his back, and flew away with them through the air. Unluckily, while they were flying, Helle turned giddy, tumbled off the ram's back, and was drowned. You have heard of the Hellespont, I suppose? Well, that is the part of the sea where Helle fell. Phryxus, however, arrived safely at the court of the king of Colchis, beyond the great Black Sea, where he sacrificed the ram to Jupiter, out of gratitude for his escape; but he kept the Golden Fleece and married the king's daughter. At last the king, wanting the Fleece for himself, murdered Phryxus. There! do you see your royal duty now?"

"Well," said Jason, "I cannot honestly say that I do."

"What? Why, this Phryxus was the son of Athamas, who was the son of Æolus, who was the father of Cretheus, who was the father of Æson, who was the father of *you*. It is as clear as day that Phryxus was your own first cousin once removed. And what duty can be clearer than avenging the murder of a first cousin once removed? Especially when the murderer has a fleece of pure gold waiting for some brave man to bring away. It is so clear a duty that, if you decline it, I will undertake the adventure myself, old as I am, rather than let the wrongs of our royal house go unavenged."

Now glory was Jason's ruling passion. He would have felt disgraced if he had declined any adventure, however difficult it might be: and the greater the danger, the greater the glory.

So he had it announced through the country and through all the neighboring countries that he had undertaken the adventure of the Golden Fleece, and that all brave knights who desired to share in its perils and glories would be welcome.

The effect of the proclamation was something wonderful. Throngs of princes and knights, the best and noblest of all Greece, came eager to take part in the expedition; so that Jason found himself captain of a host the like of which for birth and valor had never been seen. There were fifty chiefs, and every one of them known to fame. It would be too long to name them all. But I must mention "the great twin brethren," Castor and Pollux, whom you know by more than name; and Orpheus the minstrel, and that other great minstrel, Amphion, whose music had built the walls of Thebes; and Autolycus, the craftiest, and Nestor, the wisest, of all mankind; and Hercules, the son of Jupiter, of whose deeds you will read hereafter; and Meleager, who has also a famous story of his own; and Theseus of Athens, with whom you will also meet again. All these and all their comrades were, like their captain, in the flower of their youth, strength, and valor. Atalanta, a princess and great huntress, joined the expedition disguised as a man. And Æsculapius was its surgeon and physician.

The next thing was to build a ship to carry so large a company across the great and terrible Black Sea, which the Greeks called the 'Euxine,' or 'Friendly,' giving it a good name just because they were afraid to give it a bad one, lest it should be angry. The ship was at last built, and called the *Argo*.

The Argonauts, as Jason and his company were called, that is to say, the crew of the *Argo*, set sail in great state and honor from a port of Thessaly, crossed the Ægean Sea, passed through the Hellespont, the strait where Helle had been drowned, into the Sea of Marmora (as it is now called), and then into the Black Sea.

From end to end of these dark and dangerous waters the good ship *Argo* sailed without mishap, save the death of its first pilot, soon after starting. One reason why they got on so well was that when Captain Jason built the *Argo*, Minerva made him a present of a figurehead for his vessel. It was carved from a limb of the speaking oak of the oracle of Dodona, a noted place in northwestern Greece. There were times on this perilous voyage when the Argonauts did not know which way to go, and the figurehead directed their course.

But I cannot help thinking that there was another reason for the good luck of the *Argo*. For once, when a great storm arose and threatened shipwreck, suddenly two flames of light were seen to play round the heads of Castor and Pollux, and forthwith the wind fell and the waves became calm. As Macaulay says,

> Safe comes the ship to haven,
>   Through billows and through gales,
> If once the Great Twin Brethren
>   Sit shining on the sails.

If this was the virtue of their spirits after death, we may be certain that it was a good thing to have Castor and Pollux on board during their brave and blameless lives. Those two flames of light are still often seen hovering about a ship in stormy weather, and sailors still believe them to be of good omen.

After a long voyage the *Argo* arrived safely at the capital of Colchis, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, where dwelt the king who had murdered Phryxus.

Colchis was a rich and fertile country, inhabited by a people curiously like the gypsies, with very dark complexions and black hair, dressed in brightly colored linen which they alone knew how to weave and dye. They claimed to be descended from a tribe of Egyptians who had wandered thither ages ago; and they had many other secrets which none but they and the Egyptians knew.

Jason, at the head of his company, went before the king of Colchis and demanded the Golden Fleece. The king received him in state, sitting on his throne; and, after hearing Jason's demand, answered, " Far be it from me, a mere barbarian chieftain, to refuse what is asked of me by so noble an embassy of princes and heroes. I would even now deliver up to you the Golden Fleece, were it in my power. But how can I give it to you when it is guarded, even from myself, by two fierce bulls with brazen horns, which breathe forth flame, and are a match for armies? Before you can obtain the Fleece, you must first tame these bulls."

Jason desired nothing better. So he and his comrades went into the field where the bulls were, and endeavored to bind them. But neither he, with all his courage, nor the craft of Autolycus, nor the might of Hercules, nor the courage, skill, and strength of the whole company together, could prevail against the bulls, who breathed fire, and gored right and left with their brazen horns. There was plenty of surgical work for Æsculapius that day.

The king had known very well how it would be; but Jason, when night came, retired in despair. Midnight found him still waking, when the door of his chamber opened, and there stood before him, holding a lamp, a tall and beautiful woman, dark-skinned, black-eyed, and with long black hair. Although beautiful, as I have said, she was terrible in her beauty.

"You have no cause for shame," she said, in a softer voice than he would have expected. "They were enchanted bulls: and not ten times your number would have fared better. This is a nation of enchanters, whose king knows how to laugh you Greeks and your boasted bravery to scorn. But I am the greatest of all enchanters; and I will teach you how to tame the bulls, if you will promise me one thing."

"Anything," said Jason. "Only tell me who you are, and what you require of me."

"I am Medea, the king's daughter. What I require is that you shall marry me this night in the Temple of Hecate, the queen of witches, and that you will swear before her altar to be true and faithful to me forever."

"Gladly," exclaimed Jason, who, to succeed in his adventure, would have sworn anything.

So he followed her to the Temple of Hecate, and there, with many strange and dreadful rites, he married Medea, and swore to be true and faithful to her forever.

Then she gave him a magic herb, and said, "This will tame the bulls." And she also gave him a sling and a stone, adding, "Use this when there is need."

The next morning Jason went into the field alone. As soon as the scent of the herb reached the bulls' nostrils, they crouched at his feet; and when the king and his court, and the Greek princes with them, came forth, lo, there was Jason quietly driving a plow drawn by the bulls, who were now as tame as common oxen.

"Somebody has been betraying me," thought the king, angrily. But he hid his anger, and spoke: "You have done well so far. I am sorry to say, however, that the Golden Fleece has other guards. Do you see these serpents' teeth? You must sow these in the furrow you have made with your plow — and then may the gods help you if they can."

So Jason, having finished his plowing, sowed the serpents' teeth as if they were seeds of corn. And from that seed sprang up, in less than an hour, a strange harvest, an army of giants, as many as the stalks of wheat in a wide field, who rushed at Jason and the Greeks, and trampled them to the ground.

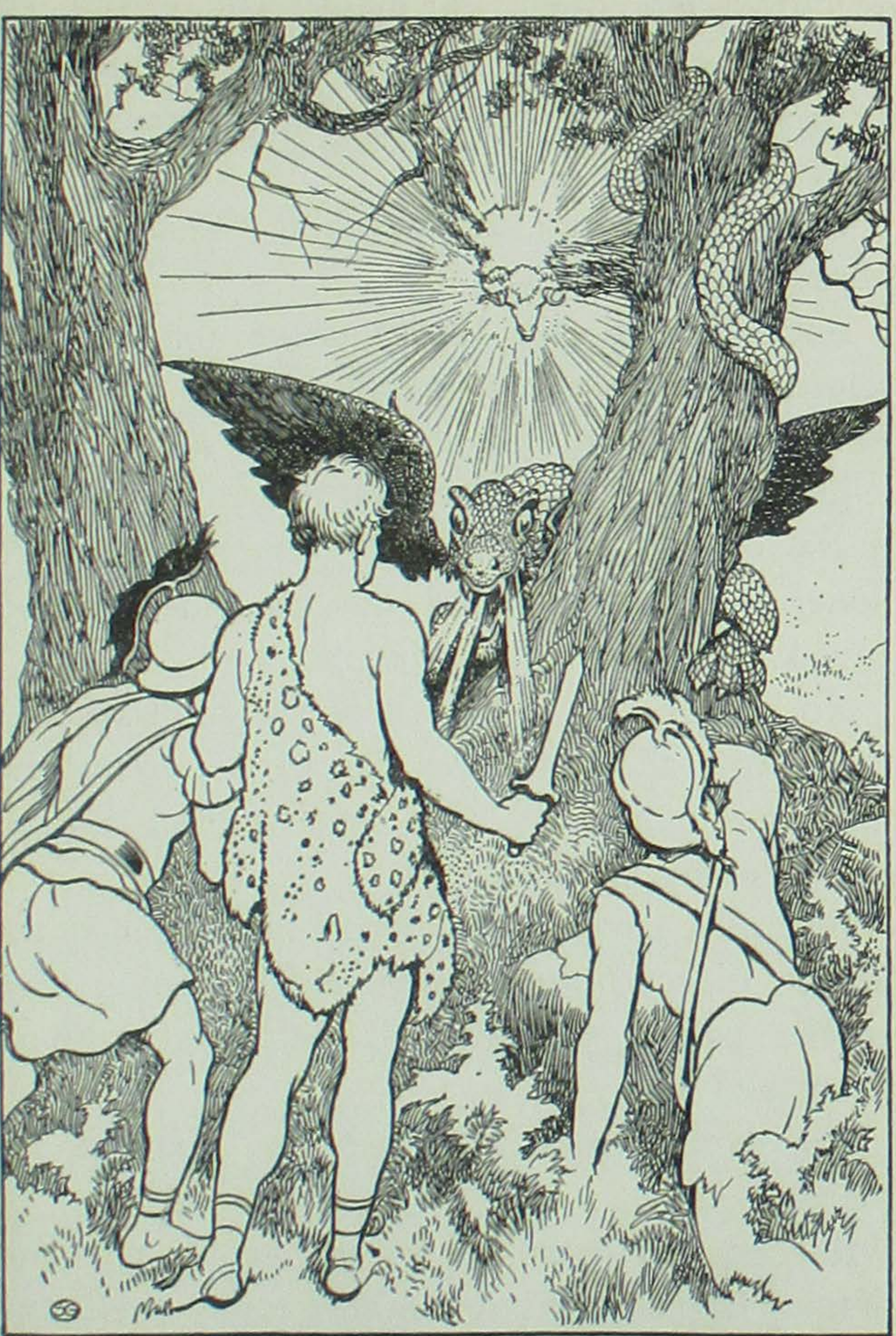
And everyone of them would have been slain had not Jason bethought him of Medea's sling and stone. Aiming at the chief of the giants, he let fly, and straightway the army vanished like the phantoms of a dream.

The king began to be afraid, for he was coming to an end of his magic spells. He felt sure he had been betrayed, but could not guess the traitor.

But again he pretended friendship, and said, "That too was well done. I see there is something in you Greeks, after all. But it grieves me to the heart to tell you that the most terrible guards of the Golden Fleece still remain, a mighty dragon that never sleeps, but watches the Fleece night and day. If you can kill *him* — why, then —"

"I can but try," said Jason.

So he and his comrades were guided by winding paths to the foot of a tree on which hung the Golden Fleece, splendid in the sun. But at the foot of the tree was a dragon that could have



devoured ten times as many, armor and all, with one crunch of his jaws. And he breathed forth such fiery pestilence that none could come near.

Truly it seemed at last as if the adventure were to be in vain.

But, at midnight, Medea came to Jason as before, and gave him another herb, and said, "Take this — and remember your vow."

Jason was not thinking of the vow, but only of the dragon. The next morning he set forth alone, and having found his way to the tree, waved the herb before the monster.

No sooner had the smell of the herb reached its nostrils than its eyes began to droop and close, and presently the ever-watchful dragon was sleeping soundly.

Instantly Jason darted past him, snatched the Golden Fleece from the tree, and hastening back to the palace, displayed it before the king's astonished eyes.

"Seize the robber," cried the king to his guards.

But he had come to an end of his enchantments: Jason's comrades rallied round their captain with drawn swords, and made for the shore.

The king raved and stormed. "Fetch Medea to me," he cried; "she shall raise such a tempest as will sink the foreign pirates to the bottom of the sea."

But even as he spoke, in ran one of the slaves with the news: "The Princess Medea — the Greeks are carrying her away."

"Medea — against her will? No!" cried the king, who now knew who had betrayed him. "There is no power on earth that could make *her* captive, or carry her away unless she chose to go."

Then turning to his son, he said, "Hasten after those brigands, and bid your sister return, and I will follow with my whole army to cut them off from their ship and destroy them all."

The news was true: Medea was so much in love with Jason that she had forgotten her father and her country, and was even now guiding the Greeks back to where the *Argo* lay.

But, great enchantress though she was, she was not all-powerful, and she knew that her spells would be in vain against her own people. And her father and her brother knew this too.

Her ears were quick, however; and while the Greeks were still far from the shore, she heard the footsteps of her brother swiftly tracking them; and what was worse, she heard, farther off, a tramp and clash, which told her that the whole army was in pursuit.

"Hasten on," she said to Jason. "I will wait here."

So, while he and the Greeks pressed forward, she faced round and stood in the middle of the path until her brother came up with her. Before he could utter a word, she plunged a dagger into his heart, cut off his head and limbs, and then slowly followed Jason, dropping a bleeding limb here and there.

Things happened just as she intended. When the king, riding fast at the head of his horsemen, saw his son's head lying in the path before him, he threw himself from his horse with a cry of grief; and seeing what lay farther along the ground, forgot everything else, even the Golden Fleece, in his sorrow.

The cruel witch, Medea, had foreseen that her father would never leave the remains of his dead son ungathered and unburied by the wayside for the advancing horses to trample and for the vultures to devour. The king was so long in seeking for the rest of the body that Jason and the

Greeks had reached their ship and had set sail, and Medea with them.

But the murder of the brother seemed to cling like a curse to the *Argo*, and to keep her from coming home. Driven out of her course by storms and contrary winds, she wandered into unknown oceans, drifting even so far as the wild and desolate islands of Britain, in the mysterious Northern Sea.

The Argonauts narrowly escaped being devoured, ship and all, by the horrible sea fiend Scylla, with twelve feet, six hideous heads, each with three rows of teeth, and a body made of barking dogs, who sits on a rock and watches for sailors. And, just avoiding her jaws, they nearly fell into the whirlpool of Charybdis, in the strait between Italy and Sicily, another sea fiend, so close to Scylla that it was hardly possible to escape one without being destroyed by the other.

They passed the island of the sirens, of whom you read in the story of Neptune, and would have fallen victims to their singing had not Orpheus made such music on his lyre that the sirens ceased their own song to listen, and let the ship pass by.

I do not know what Medea was doing all this while. Perhaps she was powerful only on land; perhaps she could do nothing without her magic herbs; perhaps her love for Jason had made her weak; perhaps she felt some touch of remorse; perhaps her wicked witchcraft was of no effect in the presence of Æsculapius, who, knowing more magic even than she, used his knowledge for helping and healing.

But I do know that Jason was beginning to suffer sorely because of the vow he had made of his faith and life to Medea, and to feel that murder and black magic, and a wife whom he dreaded and did not love, were too high a price to pay even for glory. He was not like Perseus, who had warred against evil with the weapons of the gods: Jason had sought only his own glory, and had gained it by means hateful to gods and men.

But his comrades knew nothing of all this. To them he was a hero of heroes, and they made the wanderings of the *Argo* famous for something better than narrow escapes from peril. They cleared the sea of pirates, a work in which Castor and Pollux especially distinguished themselves; and they righted many wrongs, and carried the knowledge of the gods among far-away barbarian tribes.

And at last they saw once more the coast of Greece; at last they touched the land where the father of Meleager, one of the Argonauts whom I have already named, was king.

Now this Meleager had a charmed life; for the three Fates had been present at his birth. The first had given him courage; the second, strength; but the third had decreed that he should live only so long as a log of wood, then burning on the hearth, should remain unconsumed.

So his mother, Althæa, had forthwith snatched the brand from the burning, and had kept it with care, because on it depended the life of her son.

Meleager welcomed Jason and his companions; but they no sooner landed than they heard evil news. The whole country was being laid waste by a huge boar, which not even armies could kill.

Here was another adventure for the Argonauts. They proclaimed a great hunt, and tracked the boar, through mountains and forests, to his very den.

In front of the hunters was Meleager; but next to him came Atalanta, that famous huntress, swift-footed as Diana, who had sailed with the

Argonauts in the disguise of a man, and had betrothed herself to Meleager while they were homeward bound.

Then followed the rest, vying with each other which should be foremost; and besides the Argonauts were the princes and nobles, led by the two brothers of Althæa, who still kept the fatal firebrand secure.

They drove the boar to bay at last, and after a desperate struggle Meleager gave it its deathblow.

All his companions rejoiced at his good fortune; but when he gave the boar's head, as a trophy, to Atalanta, the two brothers of Althæa stood forth and said, " It is not right to give such honor to a woman, a woman who has no more right to it than we. Such trophies are for men."

So saying, they tried to seize it from her. But Meleager, enraged at the insult to Atalanta, defended her with his sword, and so unfortunately well that both his uncles were slain.

Althæa, watching from her window for the return of the hunters, at last saw them pass mournfully, bearing the bodies of her dead brothers.

"Who has done this?" she cried; and being told it was Meleager, she cursed him, and, in her grief and passion, threw the fatal brand on the hearth, where it was caught by a flame.

Meleager, though still far off, was forthwith seized with scorching pains in all his limbs. As the brand burned, so he burned also, and when it was consumed, a flame seemed to clutch his heart, and he fell dead in Atalanta's arms.

Althæa, overwhelmed, when it was too late, with horror at the result of her rage, slew herself with her own hand. And such was the miserable ending of the great boar hunt.

The Argonants, having at last returned to Greece, parted, and went each to his own home.

Jason drew the *Argo* on shore near Corinth, consecrating it to Neptune, and leaving it there as a monument of so famous a voyage. Then he returned to his own country, bringing the Golden Fleece with him.

He was received with triumph and rejoicing, and a great feast was prepared to welcome him home. But, to his sorrow, he found his father Æson so enfeebled by old age as not to be able to be present at the festival.

"Do not trouble yourself about that," said Medea. "Let Æson only put himself in my hands, and he shall be as young as you."

Jason, knowing his wife's power, consented. So she drew all the blood out of Æson's veins, and filled them with the juice of certain herbs; and he came to the festival as young-looking and as vigorous as his own son.

But Pelias, who had wrongfully kept the throne, and who hated Jason, was getting old too; and his daughters, when they saw what had happened to Æson, besought Medea that she would make their father also young and strong again.

"You need not come to me for that," she said. "You can do it for yourselves when I have shown you how."

So she killed an old ram, cut him up, and boiled the pieces in a caldron into which she had secretly thrown some herbs. When the water was cold, out from the caldron skipped a young lamb, and frisked away.

The whole thing looked so easy that the daughters of Pelias that very night prepared a caldron; and, when the water boiled, killed their father, divided him limb from limb, and threw in the pieces, just as Medea had done with the ram. But nothing happened, though they waited till the flesh had boiled away from the bones.

They hastened to Medea to help them. But she received them with scorn.

"Murderesses!" she exclaimed, "and fools! It is you who butchered Pelias; it is you who must make him live again, if you can. His death is on your hands; not on mine."

Thus Jason was delivered from his enemy. But the manner of his deliverance got about among the people. They rose up against Medea, and drove her out of the city; and Jason had to follow her to whom he had sold his soul for glory.

He had never loved her; and now his fear of her was turning into hate, and the hate into loathing and horror. All the wickednesses and cruelties she had committed for his sake seemed to have become his own, and to be so many curses upon him. And even her magic had not prospered, seeing that it had cost him the kingdom he might have gained by fair means, and had driven him into exile.

His only comfort was in their two children, whom he loved dearly; and at last he could bear life with the terrible Medea no longer. He determined to leave her; to take the children away from such a mother; and to take another wife whom he could love, and who would not be a terror to him.

Such a wife he found in Creüsa, a princess of Corinth. But he was terribly mistaken if he thought he could break the vow he had made to Medea at the altar of Hecate, the queen of the witches.

Medea pretended to be quite content with what had been arranged. She sent Creüsa a wedding dress, and had her children brought to her to bid them farewell. The feast was at its height, and Jason was rejoicing in his freedom, when a cloud seemed to come over the guests; and there stood Medea, dark and stern, leading her two children by the hand.

"Traitor and perjurer!" she said to Jason, so that all the guests could hear. "Is this your return for the love I have given you; for the country I left for you; for the sins I have done for you, sins that you took the fruits of, but were too cowardly to do? I have given you to the last moment to prove your faith; and now the last moment has gone. As you choose to be bound to me no longer, my own hands shall destroy the last links that bind you and me."

So saying, like the tigress she was, she took up the children and dashed them dead upon the floor.

At the same moment Creüsa shrieked with

agony from the poisoned wedding dress that was clinging to her and destroying her.

Jason rushed upon Medea with his sword. But before he could reach her, a chariot drawn by flying dragons, none knew whence, had borne her away, none knew whither, through the air.

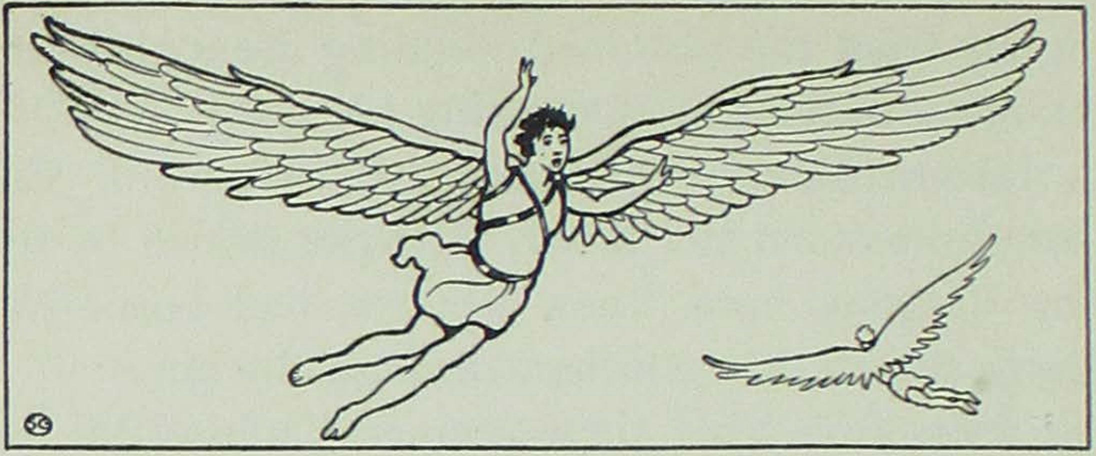
Jason, from that time, seemed haunted by the Furies. He wandered aimlessly about the world, unable to rest, until one day his eyes fell on the ship *Argo*, still reposing peacefully on the shore.

We may imagine all the things the sight brought to his mind: his old dreams of glory; the unholy vow which had seemed to fulfill them; the weakness and the unfaithfulness which had destroyed them, and him, and others through him.

Doubtless he then saw in Medea not so much the cruel witch as the evil of his own heart, which had taken shape and form and had become a curse from which he could not get free.

"If I could only rest like you," he cried out, falling on his knees before the ship with bowed head and clasped hands.

And it seemed as if the *Argo* heard her old captain's prayer. A yard dropped from the mainmast upon his bowed head: and ship and captain lay at rest together.



CHAPTER XXVI

A LOST SECRET

MINOS, the chief judge of the court of the dead in Hades, had been during his life the king of Crete, that large island, southeast of Greece, where Jupiter had been hidden from Saturn. Before the reign of Minos the Cretans had been a number of rude and savage tribes, brigands by land and pirates by sea. He, however, made a single nation of them, civilized them, suppressed brigandage and piracy, built cities, formed a regular army and navy, and gave his people a code of wise and just laws.

When he, for his justice and his knowledge of law, was made chief judge in Hades, he was succeeded in his kingdom of Crete by his son, Minos the Second.

This second Minos also was a great and powerful king. He conquered many of the neighboring islands, adding them to his dominions, and made war on the Athenians, whom he defeated utterly.

One of his sons having been killed in that war, he took a cruel revenge on the vanquished enemy. He laid a tribute on the city of Athens; and the tribute was that the Athenians should send him every year seven boys and seven girls to be devoured by a monster called the Minotaur, a creature half man and half bull.

When this savage monster first appeared, Minos had been sorely puzzled what to do with such a scourge. Nobody could kill it; and unless it was regularly supplied with a full meal of boys and girls, its fury became uncontrollable. It was partly to keep the Minotaur quiet that he had exacted that particular tribute from his enemies. But neither were the Cretan children safe while the Minotaur was at large.

One day, however, there came to the court of Minos a stranger who gave his name as Dædalus, an Athenian, and announced himself as having fled from his native city to escape a charge of murder. He was accompanied by a young man, his son, whom he called Icarus; and he asked for whatever employment the king might choose to give him.

"What can you do?" asked Minos.

"Three things," said Dædalus. "I can split the hardest rocks; I can make ships go without oars; and out of wood and metal I can make living men."

"Prove your words," said Minos; "and if you do these things, I will take both you and your son into my service, and pay you well."

Dædalus bowed, and obtained leave to set up a forge, where he and Icarus were soon heard working all night and all day.

If the listeners could have looked in, they would have been surprised. Dædalus was making nothing more wonderful than pieces of iron, sharp at one end and thick at the other. When he had made enough, he summoned the king and his court to see him split the biggest and hardest rock they could find on the seashore.

They soon fixed on a granite cliff. Dædalus put the sharp end of one of his pieces of iron into one of the smallest cracks in the face of the cliff, and hammered on the blunt end till he had driven it home. Then between this and the stone he drove in another piece of iron; and between these two a third; and so on, and so on, while the rock began to gape, and then to split, until the upper portion parted itself from the lower, and thundered down into the sea.

The secret was simple enough. Dædalus had simply invented the *wedge*, which can do much greater things than that when it is skillfully used. But the Cretans were amazed to see, as they thought, one man knocking over a cliff with a common hammer.

Then Dædalus set up a workshop by the shore, with some long sheds, and a supply of hemp and timber. Here also he worked day and night; and at last called Minos and his court to see a ship go without oars.

The ship had a tall pole rising from the middle of the deck. Dædalus and Icarus went on board, and were seen pulling at some long ropes; and presently the ship seemed to spread out wings like a bird, and to skim over the water as fast as the wind without the help of an oar.

Dædalus had invented *sails*. But the Cretans were more amazed than before, never having thought of such a simple thing for themselves.

Dædalus then went back to his forge; and what he did there nobody could guess, for scarce a sound was heard.

After many days, however, he went to the king's palace, he and Icarus carrying a long and heavy chest between them. The chest being opened before Minos, Dædalus took out from it a number of images, exquisitely wrought in wood, bronze, ivory, silver, and gold. They represented men and women; fauns, nymphs, animals; creatures of all sorts and kinds.

When Minos had looked at them and admired them, Dædalus touched them one after another; and then, with a whirring noise, the images seemed to live. The nymphs and satyrs joined hands, and danced in a ring round a bronze Pan who piped to them; a number of wooden young men boxed and wrestled.

In short, Dædalus had invented *clockwork*. But the Cretans were more amazed than ever, and stood staring, half delighted, half frightened, till he put up the figures in their box again.

"You are the man for me," exclaimed Minos. "I said I would take you into my own service; and I will. You shall make a cage for the Minotaur."

This was certainly not the reward which Dædalus had looked for. However, he said nothing, but again shut himself up, this time with writing materials, compasses, and rules.

After a long time he got a body of workmen together, and built a labyrinth, a mass of passages and windings so contrived that nobody who was outside could find the way in, and nobody who was once inside could find the way out again. Nobody, that is to say, unless he had the clue, which was of course to be kept secret.

The clue which Dædalus invented, and a good sort it was, was a long silken thread, with one end fastened to the middle of the labyrinth, carried along all the windings to the entrance.

Anybody wishing to get in would have to know this, and in which of the many entrances (for there were hundreds of false ones) he must look for the hidden end of the thread. Then all he would have to do would be to wind up the thread into a ball, following it as he wound, until he reached the middle of the maze.

And of course there was another clue to lead him out again in the same way.

The middle of the labyrinth was a hall with many columns, and an opening in the roof to let in light and air.

This labyrinth having been finished, Dædalus enticed the Minotaur into the central hall, locked him up there, and gave Minos the key.

So the Cretan children were safe, and the monster had to be content with his fourteen young Athenians every year.

Dædalus kept on doing work after work for Minos, inventing one thing after another, until the queen, who was a wicked woman, persuaded Dædalus to help her in some piece of wickedness which was discovered by the king. Whatever the affair was, it was kept secret to prevent a court scandal. The king's anger fell upon Dædalus and Icarus, both of whom he imprisoned in their own labyrinth, not, I suppose, in the same chamber with the Minotaur.

Indeed, I am sure not; because if they had been in the same chamber, Dædalus could have got out by means of the clue. But there was no clue to the chamber where he was imprisoned, and he had built the labyrinth so cleverly that he himself was lost in its mazes.

Poor Icarus was in despair.

But Dædalus only sat down on the base of a column and thought things over in his usual silent and quiet way. After thinking for some days, until they were nearly starved, he set Icarus wondering by doing as follows:

First, with one of his wedges, he chipped off pieces of stone from the columns.

Secondly, in the same way, he broke the fragments into pieces of nearly the same size, rounding them roughly.

Thirdly, from a strip of his coat he made a sling.

Fourthly, he watched the opening in the roof, and whenever a bird passed overhead he discharged a stone, and generally brought it down.

Fifthly, when he had got a sufficient number of birds, he plucked out and sorted their wing feathers.

Sixthly, he collected all the wax candles in the chamber, and melted them in a fire which he obtained by some secret invention of his own.

Seventhly — but what he did seventhly Icarus could not see.

At last, however, his mysterious work seemed done. There lay before him two pairs of wings, beautifully made of wax and feathers.

"I have long thought," said Dædalus, "how to invent a method of flying. I am glad of this imprisonment, which has obliged me to fix my whole mind on it without interruption."

"You have found out how to fly, and with wings like those," exclaimed Icarus in amaze.

"With these very wings. Why not? Science always looks simple. What can look more simple than a wedge, a sail, a clock spring? Fasten those wings on your shoulders with the wax, just as you see me fasten these on mine. There! Now open them; do you not feel as if you could reach the clouds? Spread them. Mount. Fly."

So saying, he soared up through the opening in the roof, Icarus following him, and steered westward, higher and higher through the air. It was morning when they started; by noon they were over the sea out of sight of land.

"Take care," cried Dædalus. "Don't fly *too* high."

But Icarus, reveling in all the delights of a sea gull, nay, of an eagle, soared higher and higher toward the noontide sun. In vain Dædalus called on him to come lower. He only laughed at his father for being timid and cautious, and soared higher and higher still toward the blazing sky.

Suddenly he felt his wings weakening; the wax was melting in the heat of the sun. He tried to spread them, so as to let himself down safely. They hung soft and limp, and down he came headlong into the sea.

"It's quite clear that I must think of something stronger than wax," thought Dædalus, as he saw Icarus sink and drown. "Well, I've lost my son, but I've gained an idea."

Taking care to fly as low as he could, he himself reached the island of Sicily, where he set up another forge, found another king to keep him going, and invented so many wonderful things that to this very day nobody knows what they were.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CHAMPION OF ATHENS

A GREEK princess named Æthra became the wife of Ægeus, the king of Athens. They had an only child, a boy, whom they named Theseus. While Theseus was still an infant, and his parents were at his mother's old home, his father said one day to Æthra, "I am obliged to set off on a long and distant journey, through countries infested by wild beasts and robbers. If I should never return, take care of our child, bring him up like a king's son, and send him to the city of Athens as soon as he grows strong enough to lift that"; and he pointed to a large stone.

Æthra promised, and her husband left, never to return.

Having given up all hope of seeing her husband again, Æthra devoted herself to obeying his last commands. She gave Theseus the education of a prince; and every day, from the time he left her arms, she made him try to lift the stone.

The child grew up to be the handsomest, strongest, and bravest youth in all the land, so that he had not a rival of his own age in manly sports and feats of arms. But he could no more move the stone than he could fly.

At last, however, the moment came when the stone gave way a little. The next day he raised it a trifle farther, and so on until he lifted it bodily from the ground, and rolled it away. Underneath he found a splendid sword, with a curiously carved hilt, unlike any he had ever seen.

The time had therefore come for him to set out for Athens, according to his father's commands. His mother implored him to go by sea, and not by those perilous paths by which her husband had never returned. But Theseus was only tempted by the dangers; and so, taking the sword with him, he set out for Athens overland.

After a long journey through a wild and difficult country, he reached a village, where he sought for supper and a night's lodging. But the place seemed deserted, and it was only after a long search that he discovered an old shepherd, of whom he asked where a traveler might find food and shelter.

"Alas," answered the shepherd, "there is not a scrap of food left in the place, not a house left unplundered. For Sciron has been here."

"And who is Sciron?" asked Theseus.

"Ah, you must be a stranger indeed. Sciron is the chief of all the robbers. Do you see yonder castle among the mountains? That is where he lives, and thence he issues forth, when he wants food for his gluttony, to plunder and lay waste all the country round. And he is as cruel and savage as he is greedy. Not content with carrying off our cattle and our other stores, he seizes men and women, and makes them wait upon him while he feasts; and when the feast is over, he amuses himself by throwing them from a high rock into the sea."

"Thank you," said Theseus. "Then I will sup with Sciron."

And off he started for the robber's castle, leaving the amazed shepherd to think him a madman.

It was a long climb to the castle, which stood on the peak of a high cliff looking down into the sea. Theseus knocked on the gate with the hilt of his sword, and, when it was opened by a ferocious-looking brigand, announced himself as a stranger who requested hospitality.

"You 've come to the right place for that," said the brigand, grimly. "Come with me."

Theseus followed him into the hall, where broth was being brewed in caldrons, and a fat ox was being roasted whole. The robbers were all about, some preparing the feast, some already carousing, some quarreling over their plunder, some sprawling about the floor. In the midst of all the steam and din sat the chief, a huge and cruel-looking brute, whom Theseus did not need to be told was Sciron.

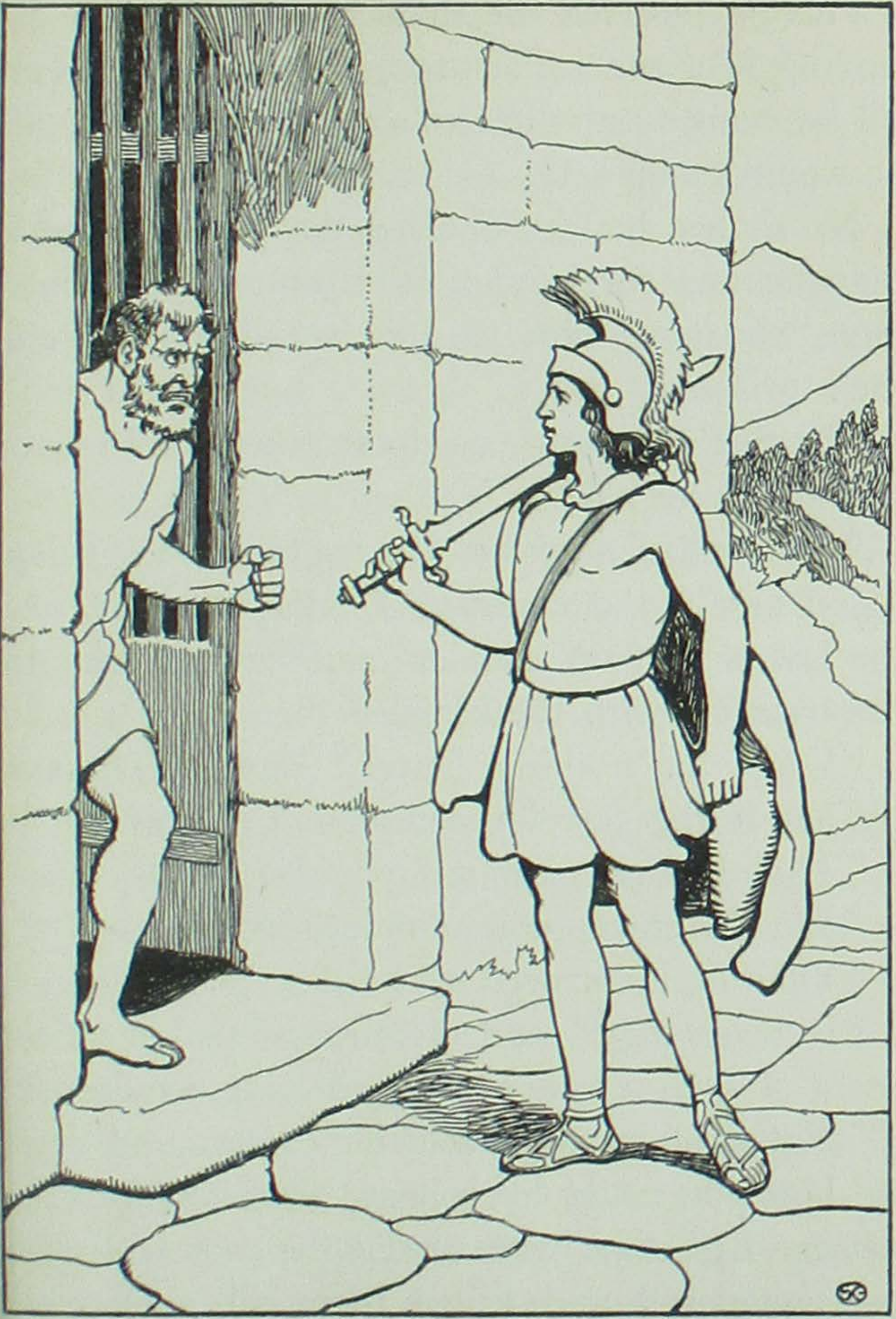
"So you want hospitality, do you?" asked Sciron. "Very well, as you 're a traveler, and don't know the ways of the castle, you shall be let off easily. Of course you 'll have to be thrown from the cliff after supper; that 's the rule. But instead of being tortured, you shall only wash my feet for me and wait on me at table. You look as if you understood washing and how things ought to be served. Now, then, get some hot water and begin," he said, thrusting out a pair of feet which looked as if they had not been touched by water for years.

A grinning robber brought a bowl of hot water. Theseus took it and threw it in the face of Sciron. "That wants washing too," he said.

Sciron rushed at him; but Theseus received him at the point of his sword, and the two fought furiously, while the robbers looked on, enjoying the game. Sciron was twice the size and weight of Theseus; but Theseus was the best swordsman in all Greece, and presently had him down.

"There," he said, pricking Sciron's throat with his sword, "you have had a lesson in manners. You shall wash *my* feet and wait on *me* before you go over the cliff after your victims. For I am not going away to leave a brigand like you alive behind me."

Sciron, like all such bullies, was a coward at heart, and his own men had no longer any respect for him now that he had been worsted by a stripling. Amid the laughter of the robbers he had to wash the feet of Theseus, and to serve him humbly with meat and drink, and was finally punished for his many cruel murders by being thrown into the sea.



Having received the thanks of the country for ridding it of such a scourge, Theseus traveled on till he came to another village, where he thought he would rest a little.

No sooner had he entered the place, however, than he was surrounded by a number of armed men, who gave him to understand that he was their prisoner.

"Is this the way you treat travelers in your country?" he asked.

"Assuredly," answered the captain of the troop. "You are in the country of King Cercyon, and the law is that no traveler may leave it until he has wrestled with the king."

"I ask for nothing better," replied Theseus. "What if the traveler conquers Cercyon?"

"Then he may pass on."

"But if Cercyon conquers him?"

"Then he is tortured till he dies."

"It is strange," said Theseus, "that I never heard of such a law, or even of King Cercyon."

"Not at all strange," said the captain. "I don't see how you could have heard it, seeing that no traveler has ever lived to tell the tale. Cercyon has conquered and killed them all, as he will conquer and kill you."

And when he saw Cercyon, Theseus could well believe it. The king was of immense height, with broad shoulders, and muscles that stood out like globes of iron. He smiled savagely when he saw Theseus, and stripped without a word. Theseus stripped also, and the two were soon clasping each other like a pair of fierce bears, or rather like a bear and a man.

It was a tremendous struggle, with all the brute strength on the side of Cercyon. But Theseus knew a hundred turns and twists of which the savage chieftain knew nothing; and at last, to the amazement of all who witnessed the struggle, Cercyon fell dead to the ground with a broken spine.

Thenceforth every traveler might pass through that country safely and without fear.

Theseus traveled on until he found himself benighted in a wild country, through which he wandered about until he reached a castle, where he craved a night's shelter.

Here he was kindly received, and told that the lord of the castle and of the country round was one Procrustes, or Stretcher, who never turned a traveler from his door; nay, even now there were two guests with him.

And so it proved. Procrustes entertained Theseus and the other two travelers at supper pleasantly and generously, and when it was time to retire for the night, he conducted them into a chamber where a bed, with nothing remarkable about it, stood ready in a corner.

"That is the guest bed," said Procrustes; "and I hope it will fit you."

"Fit us?" asked Theseus, puzzled.

"Yes; it is the law of the country that if the bed does not fit the traveler, the traveler must be made to fit the bed. Do you try the bed first," he said to one of the guests, the tallest of the three.

The traveler lay down, but found the bed rather short, and had to draw up his knees a little.

"Be good enough to lie straight," said Procrustes.

He did so, his feet appearing beyond the foot of the bed.

Instantly Procrustes, with a sharp hatchet, chopped them off, one after another.

"You'll fit nicely now," he said. "It's your turn next"; and he turned to the second traveler.

The man thought himself safe; for, being short, his toes did not reach the foot of the bed by a full two inches.

Procrustes gave a signal, and immediately two strong attendants seized the unfortunate man, one by the shoulders and the other by the legs, and proceeded to pull him out to the proper length, despite his yells of pain.

"Stretch him on the rack," said Procrustes. "Now," he said to Theseus, "it is your turn in the game, and I hope, for your sake, you will give less trouble than the rest of them."

Theseus had been taken aback at first by these extraordinary proceedings; but he now perceived that he had fallen in with another of those brigand chiefs who infested the country, and who resembled ogres rather than mere cruel and bloodthirsty savages.

So he drew his sword and closed with Procrustes; nor did he cease fighting till he had fitted the robber to his own bed by making him a whole head shorter.

The robbers in the place, cowed by the death of their chief, submitted to Theseus, who went round the castle and set at liberty hundreds of maimed victims of the slain monster's cruelty.

Having received such thanks as they could give him, he journeyed on and on until at last he reached Athens. What he was to do there he did not know; but there was no need for him to ask. Somehow the fame of his deeds had flown before him, how he had rid the country of Sciron and Cercyon and Procrustes, and other wild beasts and brigands, and he was received as befitted his valor.

Now Ægeus was still king of Athens, and he had taken as his queen no other than the great and dreadful sorceress Medea, whom we have read about in the story of "The Golden Fleece." She had come to Athens after the murder of her children, and had married the king.

Ægeus took a great fancy to Theseus from the young stranger's first appearance in Athens, gave him a high place at court, and treated him as if he had been his own son.

But with Medea it was different. She had a son of her own, and she was filled with jealousy lest Ægeus should make Theseus the heir to his throne. Moreover, she envied and hated him for his courage and his fame, in which he so far surpassed her own son; and she feared him too, for she failed to bring him under her magic spells.

So she plotted to destroy him in such a way that his death should never be brought home to her, just as she had made the daughters of Pelias the seeming murderesses of their own father.

She therefore pretended a great admiration for Theseus, and got the king to hold a great festival in his honor. It was arranged that Ægeus, during the feast, should send him a golden cup, in which Medea secretly steeped one of her deadliest poisons.

All went as she had planned. Ægeus sent the poisoned goblet by one of the cupbearers to Theseus, who stood up to drink the health of the king and queen.

"Hold," suddenly cried Ægeus, starting up; "what sword is that at your side?"

Theseus put down the cup to answer: "It is the sword with which I fought my way to Athens. I wear it to-day as my sword of honor."

"But how comes it at *your* side?"

Then Theseus told the story of how it had been left by his unknown father under a stone, and how his mother's name was Æthra.

Scarcely had he finished, when Ægeus, leaving his throne, fell on his neck, exclaiming, "I was that father. You are my first-born son, and the heir to my crown."

The Athenians, who already looked upon Theseus as their national hero, greeted their prince and future king with shouts of joy; and when the first excitement was over, Medea was seen no more. Enraged at the failure of her plot, and fearing discovery and vengeance, she vanished from Athens: some said they had seen her borne by dragons through the air. And this was the last of her.

Freed from her evil influence, the old love of Ægeus for Æthra revived, and he could not make enough of his and Æthra's son.

Theseus did not remain idle, but became in all ways the champion and protector of his father's people. It was he who caught alive the famous wild bull of Marathon, which had ravaged the country for years, and sacrificed it to Minerva. He never spared himself, and he never failed.

At last, however, drew nigh that evil hour of Athens, that day in every year, which we once read about in the story of "A Lost Secret," when the seven youths and seven maidens had to be sent to King Minos of Crete to be devoured by the Minotaur.

The rule was to choose the victims by lot: so that none felt safe who had sons and daughters young enough to suit the taste of the dreadful monster.

The seven girls were first chosen.

But when it came to drawing lots for the youths, Theseus said, "You need draw only six this year. I will myself be the seventh. It may be that I shall find a way to deliver Athens from this tribute; if not, it is for a prince who cannot save his people to perish with them."

Ægeus was in despair. But no entreaties could turn Theseus from his desperate resolve: neither the prayers of his own father, nor those of all the fathers and mothers in Athens, who would have drawn the seventh lot rather than that he who was the pride and hope of the city should go to certain destruction.

The ship which bore the yearly victims to the island of Crete always carried black sails in token of public mourning. Theseus, to leave a little hope behind him, promised that, if he came back alive, he would hoist a white sail while returning, so that his safety might be seen from afar.

Then, in solemn procession, amid the weeping of the crowd, the youths and maidens embarked in the black-sailed ship, Theseus leading them with the calmness of the only true courage, that which can, in cold blood, face danger for the sake of duty.

None would have thought the worse of him had he stayed behind; and if he perished, it would be as a mere victim, and without glory. Nor was it as if he were encouraged by any oracles, or helped by gifts from the gods. He was the first hero who was a mere man and yet never had any help but his own manfulness. And for all these reasons I think that his voyage is finer than any other story I have thus far told.

When the ship reached Crete, the fourteen victims were conducted to the labyrinth, there to be imprisoned until they should be given to the Minotaur.

As they passed before Minos and his court, the king's youngest daughter, Ariadne, was filled with pity and love for Theseus, and set her thoughts to work how she might save him from his doom.

But how in the world was such a thing to be done? None without the clue could either enter or escape from the maze; and even were that possible, it was not likely that the Minotaur would let himself be balked of his prey.

But she watched and waited: she hovered round the labyrinth night after night, examining every door, until at last she was rewarded by finding, just within one of them, a little silken skein hidden away in a dark corner.

The next night, having procured a torch and a sword, she bravely entered the door where the skein was, and, by winding up the silk, followed the clue. Through one twisting passage after another she wandered on and on, up and down long flights of steps, sometimes through great halls confused with columns, and sometimes through tunnels in which it was scarcely possible to stand. It seemed as if there were no end to the way.

At last, however, the end of the silken thread told her that she had reached the inmost hall: and there her torch showed a sight that froze her with fear.

The victims had been delivered over to the Minotaur. Crowded together in a corner of the hall were six youths and seven girls: stamping and tossing his horned head was the horrible monster, furious with hunger and the sight of human food.

Between the Minotaur and his despairing prey stood Theseus, facing the monster, so that he, by being the first victim, might prolong the lives of the others. He had no hope: he could not even struggle, for his hands were bound behind him with cords.

The sight of his courage gave back Ariadne hers. She darted forward, and cut his bonds with her sword.

"Fly," she cried: "follow me; I have the clue."

But as soon as Theseus felt the touch of the steel, he seized the sword from her hand, and, instead of flying, set upon the Minotaur with such fury that the monster bellowed with rage, amazement, and pain.

It was the hardest fight Theseus had ever fought: the wild bull of Marathon had been nothing to the Minotaur, who fought with a bull's strength and a man's skill and cunning. But the champion of Athens prevailed at last: and the monster fell dead with a groan which echoed through the labyrinth like the bellowing of thunder.

"It will wake the whole city," cried Ariadne: "follow me."

Theseus and his companions, scarce knowing that they were saved, followed Ariadne, who wound up the clue as she ran.

When they reached the entrance gate, the alarm of their escape had been given. Making straight for the shore, they found their black-sailed ship, sped on board, and, thanks to a kindly wind, were out at sea before they could be pursued.

The wind carried them to a beautiful island, called Naxos; and here they remained, Theseus, Ariadne, and the rest, till the breeze should blow toward Athens.

Such a breeze came in time; and then Theseus set sail for home with his thirteen companions, leaving Ariadne behind, to her great sorrow. Nor can anything make me believe that he meant this for a real parting, or that she thought so. We can think of many reasons why she should remain in Naxos for a while: it is quite certain that her powerful father Minos, who had already conquered the Athenians, and shown, by a cruel vengeance, how he hated them, would have attacked them again with all his fleets and armies if he had heard that they were giving shelter to a daughter who had betrayed him. So, leaving Ariadne safe on the island, Theseus returned to Athens as the savior of his city and the slayer of the Minotaur.

Meanwhile his father, Ægeus, had been every day and all day long looking out to sea from the farthest point of the shore for the return from Crete of the ship of mourning.

He had but little hope, but nobody can help having a little; nor did he quite despair until one morning he saw on the horizon a vessel which he felt sure was the one he was watching for in such agony of mind.

Nearer and nearer it came. Alas! its sails were still as black as when it was outward bound. Theseus had forgotten to hoist the white sail, which was to be the sign of safety.

So Ægeus, giving up his son for lost, threw himself into the sea and perished, just when Theseus was within sight of home. And that sea is called the Ægean, or the Sea of Ægeus, to this day.

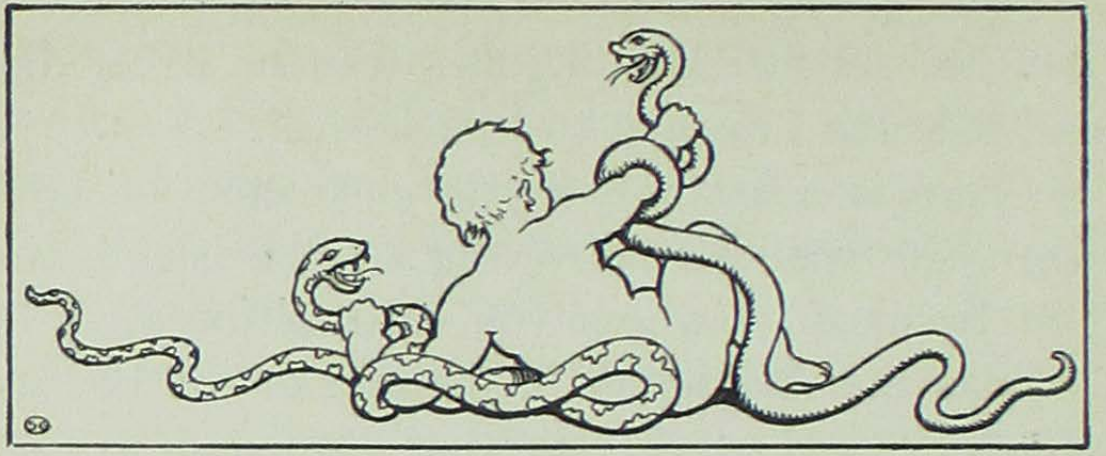
Thus Theseus, to the joy of the people, but with sorrow in his own heart, found himself king.

And the best of kings he made. The strength of his rule was only equaled by its gentleness. He made wise laws; he took care that all men received justice; he honored the gods; he obtained the respect and friendship of foreign nations; he taught the Athenians to be free, and to govern themselves, so that when he died they remained as great a people as while he was alive.

He sent for his mother, Æthra, and kept her in all love and honor. I wish I could tell you that he sent for Ariadne also. But he never did, and she was thus lost to him forever.

There is a strange, mysterious story of how, when she was left sorrowing on the island, the god Bacchus (of whom you read in the story of "Midas the Avaricious"), the god of the bounty of nature and of the joy that men and women find in her, comforted the princess, and made her his bride, and raised her above the earth, giving her a crown of seven stars, which is still to be seen in the sky, and is called Ariadne's Crown.

And there is a yet stranger story of how Theseus, after he was king, had the very wildest of all adventures, nothing less than an attempt to rescue from Hades the goddess Proserpine, and other imprisoned souls. But what happened to him there, and how he escaped the punishment of his daring, belongs to another story. It is as the hero and champion of Athens that he is remembered: and as such we will leave him.



CHAPTER XXVIII

THE HERO OF HEROES

AMPHITRYON and Alcmene, two cousins who were grandchildren of Perseus and Andromeda, got married; and Jupiter resolved that they should have a son who should be the greatest and most famous of men. But Juno was in one of her jealous moods; and she was especially jealous that such favor should be shown to Alcmene.

Having considered how she should spoil Jupiter's plan, she came to him in seeming good humor and said, "I have a question to ask you. Of two first cousins, which shall rule the other, and which shall serve, the elder or the younger?"

"Why, of course, the elder must rule the younger," answered Jupiter.

"You swear that, by Styx?" asked Juno.

"By Styx," Jupiter answered, wondering what she could mean by what seemed so trifling a question, and then thinking no more of the matter.

But Juno knew what she meant very well. Alcmene had a brother, who had married a princess; and Juno said to herself, "They also may have a son as well as Alcmene. Then the two boys would be first cousins; and Jupiter has sworn that the first-born shall rule the other. So if the princess has a son first, Alcmene's son will have to serve him and obey him: and then, O Jupiter, there will be a greater man than Alcmene's son; for he who rules must be greater than he who obeys."

Now it was Juno herself who settled when children should come into the world. It was easy, therefore, for her to manage that the son of the princess should be born two whole months before Alcmene's.

Jupiter was enraged when, too late, he found what a trick had been played on him; but he had sworn by Styx, the oath which could not be broken. Thus it became the will of Heaven that the son of Alcmene should be the servant of the son of the princess.

Now the son of the princess was named Eurystheus. The son of Alcmene was named Hercules. And Hercules had a twin brother, named Iphicles.

About the childhood of Eurystheus there was nothing remarkable. But when Hercules and his twin brother were only eight months old, the whole palace was alarmed by the screams of Iphicles, which brought Alcmene and the household running into the room where the two children had been left alone.

They saw a strange sight indeed. Poor Iphicles was found half dead with fright in a corner; and no wonder, for Hercules was being attacked by two huge serpents which were trying to crush him to death in their coils.

But so far from being frightened, Hercules had got one of his baby hands round the neck of each serpent right and left; and so he quietly throttled them till they lay dead on the floor. And this when only eight months old.

His strength grew with him till it became a marvel like that of Samson among the children of Israel, and in bulk and stature also he towered over all other men. Like many who are large and strong, he was grave and somewhat silent, using, when he spoke, but few words, not easily moved either to action or to anger, but, when once roused, then roused indeed. We seem to think of him as of some great lion.

As for training, he had the best that could be given him. Castor taught him how to use the sword; Pollux, how to use his fists. He was also taught to use the bow and arrow, and to ride and drive.

Nor were other accomplishments forgotten; for the brother of Orpheus taught him to play the lyre, and a pupil of Orpheus taught him to sing. Finally, he was sent to finish his education under Chiron, the centaur, who had taught Jason and nearly all the other heroes of that age.

At eighteen he was already famous for his strength, his accomplishments, and his promise of a great career. But he was far from perfect in other ways. There was nothing of the knightliness of his great-grandfather Perseus, or of Theseus, in this strong young giant full of pride and passion, who felt himself already greater than the best of his fellow creatures, and looked on the world as if it were made for him alone.

He would allow of no opposition to his least wish; he did not desire glory so much as power.

Good-tempered as he mostly was, it was not safe to provoke him, as his music master found, who had his own lyre broken on his head for presuming to correct his pupil a little too sharply.

Hercules now began to think of adventures worthy of his strength, and presently, as if to give him one, a lion came forth from the mountain forests and ravaged the lands of a neighboring king. To hunt and kill it unaided was child's play to Hercules.

And other services he did to the country, of small account in his own eyes, but great in those of others. The king of the land was so pleased that he gave him his daughter in marriage.

But Eurystheus, who was now a king in Greece, remembered that he had a right to his younger cousin's services by the oath of Jupiter. So he sent a message to Hercules, commanding him to come forthwith to his palace and become his servant.

Hercules, as may well be supposed, haughtily refused to obey this insolent order. Why should he, already the most famous man in all Greece, as well as the strongest, make a sort of slave of himself to a kinsman whom he scorned?

For Eurystheus was just a commonplace person, with even less than common courage, who only wanted to feed his own vanity by having in his service such a man as Hercules to do whatever he bade, and be able to say, "Hercules may be master of Greece; but I am master of Hercules."

I have said it was not strange that Hercules flatly refused to go at his cousin's bidding. But it was more than strange that, from this moment, he began to fall into such a state of mind that everybody thought he was haunted by the Furies, until he became a dangerous madman, whom none dared approach for fear of being slain.

And all the time his strength increased; so that it seemed as if he had come into the world to be a terror and a curse to mankind.

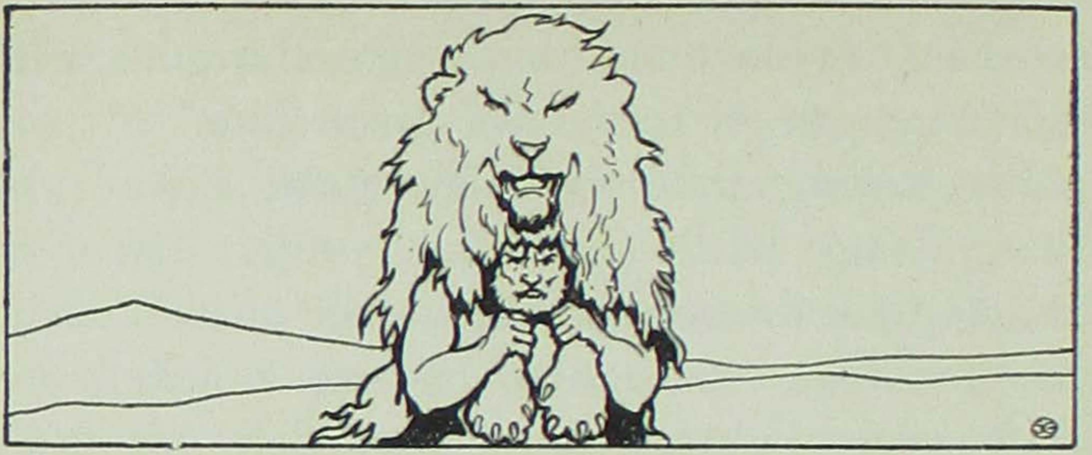
Many dreadful things he did in his madness. And when at length the frenzy passed from him, he was left in a more dreadful condition still. He was in an agony of remorse for all the violence he had done, and believed himself to be accursed and an outcast. Melancholy and despairing, he fled from his home in Thebes, and wandered out alone among the forests and the mountains. And thus he lived like a savage, hiding himself away from the sight of men.

The time came when he thought he could bear life no longer. He felt as if demons, armed with the scourges of Hades, were hunting him day and night.

At last, in his despair, he wandered to Delphi, a famous place in Greece, in whose temple Apollo's oracle, or living voice, was heard, to implore the gods to tell him what he should do.

And the voice of Apollo answered him: "O Hercules, those things were not sins which you did in your madness. Your madness is not sin, but the punishment for your real sin, the sin of pride, and self-love, and defiance of the will of Heaven. In rebelling against Eurystheus you have rebelled against the gods, who decreed even before your birth that he should rule and you should serve. Is it not frequently so? Are not oftentimes the good made subject to the wicked, the wise to the foolish, the strong and valiant to the weak and craven? The gods give each man his own different place and work; they have decreed that you shall serve Eurystheus: therefore obey. Seek not to know why this should be, nor question the justice of the gods. Know your duty, and do it with your might; and so you will be great enough; for no man can do more than serve the gods with such strength as they have given him."

For a long time Hercules stood before the altar, doing battle with his pride. Then, at last, he took the road to the palace of his cousin. As he went, each step became quicker, his heart grew lighter, the shadow left his soul, and his peace of mind returned.



CHAPTER XXIX

THE NEMEAN LION

HERCULES, being arrived at the city of Mycenæ, in southern Greece, submitted himself to Eurystheus, who, to tell the truth, was a little alarmed at the sight of his cousin, and suspicious of what such sudden submission might mean. He was all the more bewildered when he saw the humility with which his kinsman approached him. Hercules could not do anything by halves; and in Eurystheus he saw, not a mere insignificant, timid, mean-minded man, but only the master whom the gods had appointed for him.

"And now," asked Hercules, in his impatience to prove his obedience, "what do you bid me do?"

You would think that Eurystheus would have acted generously. So far from that, however, he thought to himself, "I had better send him on the most dangerous adventure I can think of. If he succeeds, it will be the more glory for me to have such a man under my power; besides, it will prove whether this submission is real or sham. And if he perishes, well, I shall be safe from danger at his hands."

So he said, "You have proved yourself a good lion hunter. Bring me the carcass of the Nemean lion."

Now the lion of the forest of Nemea was far more terrible than any ordinary lion. However, Hercules set out at once for the forest, glad that his first service was one of honor.

Eurystheus was quite relieved when he was gone; and, sending for skilled workmen, he bade them make for him a large brazen pot, big enough to hold him comfortably, and with an opening just large enough for him to get in and out by. For he thought to himself, "If Hercules ever gets angry or rebellious, I can creep into my brazen pot, and be safe there."

Hercules was not long in finding the lion, the largest, strongest, and fiercest ever seen in the world. He let fly an arrow, but it scarcely pricked the beast's tough hide; then another, and another; but the lion minded them no more than if they had been shot by a child from a toy bow.

At last, however, one pierced him sharply enough to enrage him, and he came on with a rush and a roar. All Hercules had time to do was to pull up a young oak tree by the roots, for a weapon to meet the charge.

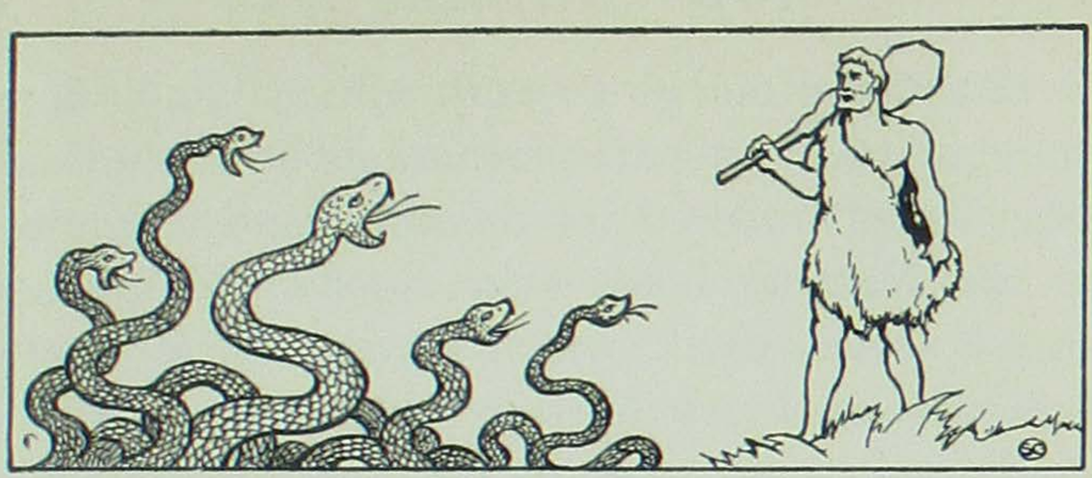
The next moment the lion sprang. But Hercules stood his ground, and so belabored him with his club that he fairly beat him back into his den.

Then was there a fearful wrestle between Hercules and the lion. But Hercules prevailed, by getting his arms round the beast and crushing its breath out of its body.

Throwing the corpse over his shoulders, and holding it by bringing the forelegs round his neck, he returned to Mycenæ. Thus equipped, he himself looked like some monstrous lion; and so terrified was Eurystheus at the news that he crept into his brass pot, and in this manner received Hercules, to whom he talked through a tube in the side.

"Go and kill the Hydra," he called out.

So Hercules set out on his second labor: and Eurystheus crept out of his pot again.



CHAPTER XXX

THE LERNÆAN HYDRA

NOW the Hydra was more formidable than the Nemean lion. Nobody in his senses would dream of attacking it with the least hope of succeeding. It was a huge water snake which lived in Lake Lerna, whence it used to issue to seek for human food. It had a hundred heads, and from each of its hundred mouths darted a forked tongue of flame, dripping with deadly poison.

I said that nobody in his senses would attack the Hydra. But I was not quite right. There was just one sense which would lead a man to attack any evil, even without hope: of course I mean the sense of duty. And it was in that sense that Hercules set forth for Lake Lerna.

But he did not go to work without ample forethought, taking all the precautions he could think of. He remembered the thickness and toughness of the Nemean lion's skin; so he had it made into a sort of cloak, which served him for armor better than brass or steel. He also made the young oak tree into a regular club, which thenceforth became his favorite weapon. You may always know Hercules in pictures and statues by his knotted club and the lion's skin.

Instead of going alone he took with him his friend and kinsman Iolaus, to act as his squire.

It was easy enough to find the Hydra; indeed, too easy. It had its nest in a foul, stagnant swamp, the air of which its breath turned to poison.

Giving Iolaus his other arms to hold, Hercules attacked the Hydra with his club alone, trusting to the lion's skin to receive the strokes of the creature's fangs. With a tremendous blow he crushed one of the Hydra's hundred heads, leaving ninety-nine more to destroy if he could hold out so long.

That was bad enough to think of, but, to his dismay, out of the crushed head sprang two new living heads; and out of each of these, when he beat them to pieces, sprang forth two more.

And so it was with every head the Hydra had, so that, in truth, the more Hercules destroyed it, the stronger it grew: its hundred heads were rapidly becoming a thousand; and the thousand would become ten thousand; and so on, forever.

Just as Hercules realized the hopelessness of the labor, and was finding it work enough to ward off the innumerable fangs, a wretched crab crawled out of the ooze and seized him by the foot, so that he almost fainted with the sudden pain. It was too cruel, in the midst of such a battle as that, to feel himself at the mercy of the miserable vermin of the slime.

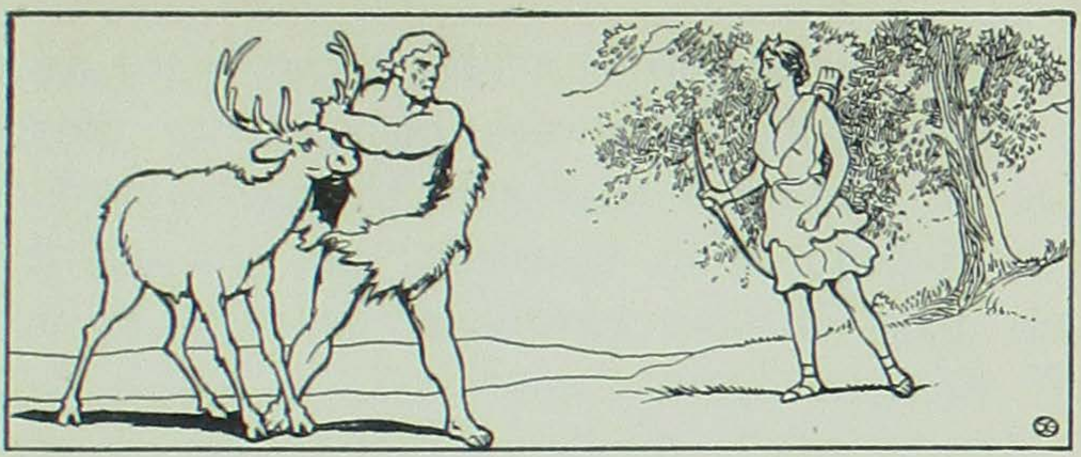
However, he crushed the crab under his heel, and ceasing to multiply his enemies by killing them, contented himself with defense, while he thought what could possibly be done.

"No doubt those first hundred heads must all have come from some one head," he thought. "They could not grow like that without a root; so that if I could only destroy the root they would cease to grow. This is my mistake: I am fighting only with what I see, instead of going to the root of things, and attacking the evil there."

So he called out to Iolaus to heat a piece of iron red-hot; and when this was ready, to stand by, and to scorch with it the place of every head which the club shattered.

The plan answered wonderfully. Hercules crushed head after head; Iolaus applied the red-hot iron; and root after root was burned up and perished. And at last they came to the root of all the heads; and when this was reached and burned, the monster sputtered and died, just when Hercules felt that he, strong as he was, could scarce have struck another blow.

Hercules cut open the Hydra, and dipped his arrows in its gall, so that they should give deadly wounds. Wearily he returned to Mycenæ, hoping for a little rest. But Eurystheus had hidden himself in his brazen pot again, whence he cried out, "Be off at once; and catch the Cerynean stag alive."



CHAPTER XXXI

THE CERYNEAN STAG

IN THE hills of Cerynea there was a stag sacred to Diana; and no wonder, for besides being so swift that no horse or hound could follow it, it had brazen feet and horns of pure gold. Of course this labor was not so dangerous as the others, but apparently more utterly impossible.

Impossible as it was, however, Hercules had to try. Had he been ordered to bring the stag to Mycenæ dead, he might perhaps have hoped to catch it with an arrow; but his orders were to bring it alive. So, having started it from its lair, he followed it with his utmost speed and skill.

At first he tried to run it down; but the stag was not only the swifter, but had as much endurance as he. Then he tried to drive it to bay, but it always managed to escape out of the seemingly most hopeless corners. He tried to catch it asleep; but his slightest and most distant movement startled it, and off it raced again.

All the arts of the deerstalker he put in practice, but all in vain. And thus he hunted the stag, scarce resting day and night for a whole year.

It looked as if he were to spend the rest of his life in pursuing what was not to be caught by mortal man; and the worst of it was that, while there was real use in destroying wild beasts and monsters, like the lion and the Hydra, his present labor, even if it succeeded, would be of no use at all.

Still it had to be attempted; and I suppose you have guessed that he succeeded, and that it was in some wonderful way. Well, he did succeed at last, but it was not in a wonderful way at all. It was just by not giving in. One of the two had to give in, and it was not Hercules. One day he managed to drive the stag into a trap and to seize it by the horns.

As he was returning to Mycenæ, dragging the stag, he met a tall and beautiful woman, dressed for the chase, and carrying a bow and quiver. As soon as her eyes fell upon the struggling stag, she frowned terribly.

"What mortal are you," she asked, "who have dared to lay hands on my own stag, the stag sacred to me, Diana? Loose it, and let it go."

Hercules sighed. "I would do so gladly, great goddess, but it is not in my power."

"Not in your power to open your hand?" she asked, in angry surprise. "We will soon see that," and she seized her stag by the other horn to pull it away.

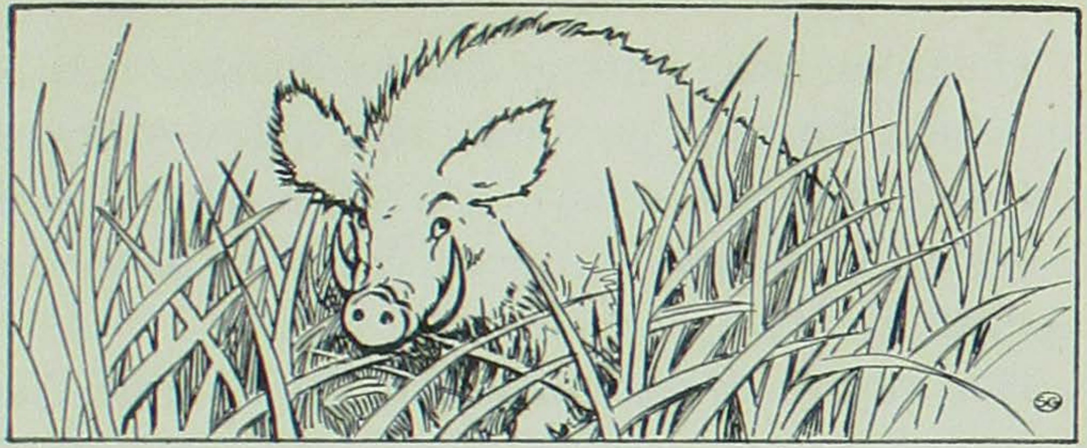
"It goes against me to oppose a goddess; but I must bring this stag to Mycenæ, and neither gods nor men shall prevent me, so long as I am alive."

"I am Diana," she said again, "and I command you to let the stag go."

"And I am only Hercules, the servant of Eurystheus, and therefore I cannot let it go."

"Then I wish," said Diana, "that any of the gods had so faithful a servant as Eurystheus has. So you are Hercules?" she said, her frown changing to a smile. "Then I give you the stag, for the sake of the oracle of my brother, Apollo. I am only a goddess; you are a man who has conquered himself, and whom therefore even the gods must obey."

So saying, she vanished. And the stag no longer struggled for freedom, but followed Hercules to Mycenæ as gently and lovingly as a tame fawn.



CHAPTER XXXII

THE ERYMANTHIAN BOAR

THE chase of the stag with the golden horns had taken so long that Eurystheus was beginning to give Hercules up for lost: and he was not sorry, for he was becoming more and more afraid of the man who only lived to do his bidding. He could not but think that his cousin must be playing some deep and underhand game.

So when Hercules came back, with the stag following tamely at heel, he hid himself again, and by way of welcome bade Hercules capture and bring him, alive, a very different sort of wild beast, not a harmless stag, but the great and fierce wild boar which had its den in the mountains of Erymanthus, and ravaged the country round.

Hercules was getting weary of these labors, to which he saw no end. Not for a moment did he think of disobeying, but he set out with a heavy heart, and with some rising bitterness against his taskmaster.

His way to the mountains of Erymanthus lay through the country of the centaurs, and of his old teacher, Chiron.

Here he halted at the dwelling of one of the centaurs, Pholus, who received him kindly. But Hercules was feeling fairly worn out in spirit, and Pholus failed to cheer him.

"What is the use of it all?" he complained. "No doubt the gods are just, and ought to be obeyed; but they are not kind. Why did they send me into the world, and give me strength, only to go about after wild beasts at the bidding of a coward? Why did they give me passions, only to have the trouble of keeping them down? If I had been like other men, weak and cold-blooded, I should have been happy, and perhaps done some real good, and at any rate lived my own life in my own way. It isn't as if I cared for glory, but I do want a little peace and pleasure. Come, Pholus, let me have something to drink."

"I am sorry," said Pholus; "I have nothing."

"Why, what is that, then?" asked Hercules, pointing to a big barrel in the corner.

"That," said Pholus, "belongs to all the centaurs; and as it is public property, nobody may take any of it without the leave of the whole tribe."

"Nonsense!" said Hercules.

So saying, he stove in the head of the cask with a single blow of his fist, and dipping and filling a goblet, he began to drink eagerly.

The drink soon began to warm his blood. But he did not stop at one cup, nor at two; nor even when it began to mount into his brain, and to bring back those wild instincts which he thought he had left behind him in the Temple of Apollo.

Meanwhile the news had spread among the centaurs that Hercules was among them. A crowd of them came at full gallop, and disturbed Hercules in the midst of his carouse.

"Do you call this hospitality, you savages?" he shouted, stumbling out of the house, and laying about him with his club freely among the crowd, while Pholus vainly tried to prevent mischief. Down went centaur after centaur, till those who were uninjured galloped away panic-stricken, Pholus himself being among the slain.

"To Chiron!" cried the centaurs; "he will know how to deal with this madman."

They rode as hard as they could to Chiron's dwelling, Hercules, furious with anger, still pursuing. As they were outstripping him, he let fly his arrows among them; and, as evil luck would have it, at that very moment Chiron rode out from his gate to see what was happening, and to quiet the disorder, when one of the arrows struck him in the knee, and he fell.

Hercules became sober enough when he came up and found his old friend and teacher writhing in terrible agony; for the arrow was one which he had dipped in the deadly poison of the Hydra. He could only look on with remorse. Chiron knew him, and while the agony passed away into death, he gave him a look of forgiveness.

What the wise centaur's last word to his favorite pupil was, I know not; but I think it must have been something like this: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

I will not try to think of what Hercules felt when he watched the burial of the friends whom he had slain in a fit of drunken passion, for no cause. However, his duty lay still before him, and it had become more clear. Never again would he complain of his fate, or question the justice of the gods, or think of the life which had been lent to him as if it were his own.

In due time, after a long and dangerous journey among the mountains, he came upon the den of the great wild boar which he was to capture alive.

There was nothing to be done but to follow it as he had followed the stag, watching for a chance of trapping it unawares; and in the pursuit another whole year passed away.

Then, in the middle of winter, there fell such a snow that the boar was unable to leave its den. Hercules forced his way through the snowed-up entrance, and tried to seize the brute as he had seized the Nemean lion.

The boar, however, rushed past him, and would have escaped again had not the snow hindered his running, and at last exhausted him.

Hercules, though nearly exhausted himself, chose the right moment for closing with him, and, after a long struggle, bound him with a halter in such a manner that, in spite of his efforts, he could drag him by main strength down the mountain.

Once more Eurystheus had given Hercules up for lost; and the snow prevented him from hearing any news beforehand. So when, while he was standing at the city gate, there suddenly appeared before him not only Hercules, all grim and rough from his year's hunting, but the largest and most savage wild boar in the world, looking ready to devour him, he was so terrified that he whisked like a frightened mouse into his pot, and did not dare come out again for seven days.

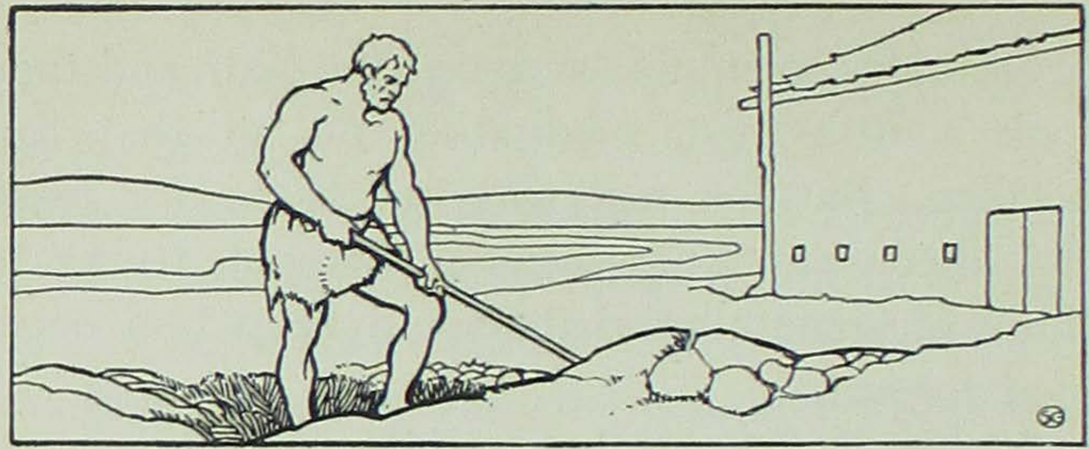
As for Chiron the centaur, he became a constellation in heaven, where he is still to be seen. He was the teacher of nearly all the heroes and demigods; and after his death there seems to have been an end of them.

There have been plenty of brave men since; but not like Castor and Pollux, Perseus, Theseus, and Hercules.

Nor, since that fatal day, do we hear of the centaurs any more. Thus did one passing fit of causeless anger, instantly repented of, destroy these wisest and most valiant creatures, and deprive the whole world of more than it has ever regained during thousands of years.

Hercules solemnly sacrificed the boar, and then took a little rest, meditating on all that had befallen. But his rest was not to be for long. For there was Eurystheus in his pot, trying to think of something that should keep him occupied forever.

"I have it," Eurystheus exclaimed at last, summoning Hercules by a stroke on the pot's brazen side.



CHAPTER XXXIII

THE AUGEAN STABLES

THE next labor which Eurystheus laid on Hercules was to clean out some stables. That does not sound very much after the others. But the stables were those of Augeas, the king of Elis, and were at once the largest and the dirtiest in the whole world.

Augeas had a prodigious number of oxen and goats, and the stables in which they were kept had never been cleaned. The result was a mountain of filth and litter, which not even Hercules could clear away in a lifetime, not, of course, from want of strength, but from want of time.

Hercules beheld with disgust and dismay the loathsome and degrading toil in which he was to spend the rest of his days. The other labors had at least been honorable, and befitting a prince: this would have appalled a scavenger.

"It is good of such a hero as you," said Augeas, "to undertake to clean my stables. They really do want cleaning, as you see; and it was kind of Eurystheus to think of it. You shall not find me ungrateful. I will give you one ox and one goat in every ten, when the job is done."

He could safely promise this, because he knew that the job could never be done.

"I am not serving for hire," said Hercules. "Nevertheless it is only right that you should not let your stables get into such a state as this, and then get them put right for nothing. You want a lesson: and you shall have it too."

Seeing that mere strength would be wasted in such toil, Hercules went to work with his brain as well. Through the land of Elis ran the river Alpheus, that same Alpheus which had told Ceres what had become of Proserpine. Hercules studied the country carefully; and having laid his plans, dug a channel from near the source of the river to one of the entrances of the stables. Then he let the stream run into the new course, which had purposely been made narrow, so that the current might be exceedingly strong.

When all was ready, he opened the sluice at one entrance of the stables, so that the water poured in a flood through the buildings, and out at a gate on the other side.

And it had all been so managed that when the river had poured through, and was shut off again, all the filth and litter was carried away by the Alpheus underground, and the stables were washed clean, without a scrap of refuse to be found anywhere.

For the Alpheus, you must know, did not run into the sea, like other rivers. It disappeared down a deep chasm, then ran through a natural tunnel under the sea, and rose again, far away, in the island of Sicily, where it had brought to Ceres the news from underground.

Thus everything thrown into it in Elis came up again in Sicily; and the Sicilians must have been considerably astonished at that extraordinary eruption of stable litter. Perhaps it was that which, acting as manure, helped to make Sicily so fertile.

Hercules made a point of claiming his price.

But Augeas said, "Nonsense! A bargain is a bargain. You undertook to clean my stables; and you have done nothing of the kind. No work, no pay."

"What can you mean?" asked Hercules. "Surely I have cleaned your stables: you will not find in them a broken straw."

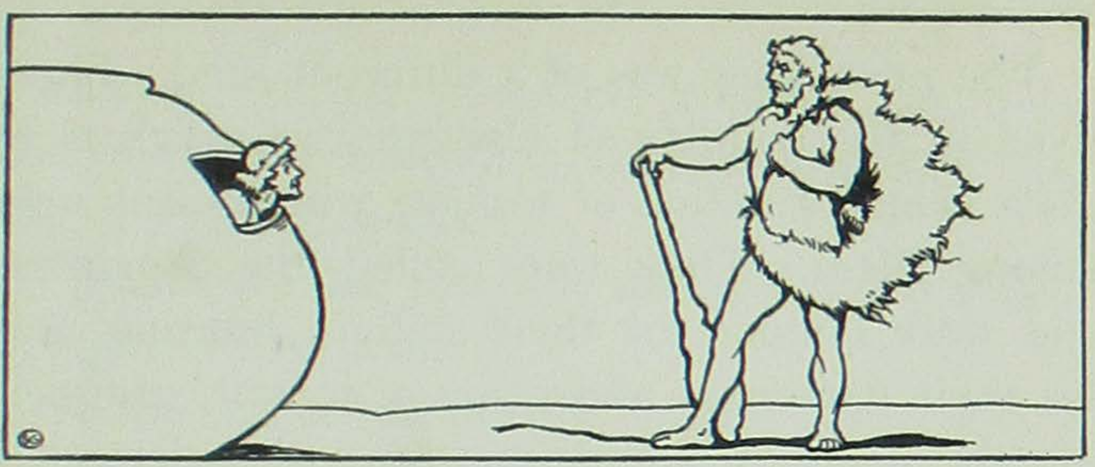
"No," said Augeas. "It was the Alpheus did that: not you."

"But it was I who used the Alpheus —"

"Yes; no doubt. But the impudence of expecting me to pay a tenth of all my flocks and herds for an idea so simple that I should have thought of it myself, if you had n't, just by chance, happened to think of it before me. You have not earned your wages. You cleaned the stables by an unfair trick; and it was the river cleaned them, not you."

"Very well," said Hercules, grimly. "If you had paid me honestly, I would have given you your goats and your oxen back again; for, as I told you, I do not serve for reward. But now I perceive that I have *not* quite cleaned your stables. There is still one piece of dirt left, and that is a cheating knave, Augeas by name. So, as I cannot go back to Mycenæ till my work is done —"

He was about to throw Augeas into the river, to follow the rest of the litter; and about what afterwards happened, different people tell different things. I strongly agree, however, with those who tell that Hercules spared the life of Augeas after having given him a lesson; for certainly he was not worth the killing. And I am the more sure of this because, after his death, Augeas was honored as hero, which surely would not have happened if he had not learned to keep both his stables and his promises clean before he died.



CHAPTER XXXIV

OTHER LABORS OF HERCULES

EURYSTHEUS was getting to his wits' end for work which should keep his cousin employed. 6th He sent him to kill the man-eating birds of Lake Stymphalus; 7th to catch, and bring to Mycenæ alive, a wild bull which was devastating Crete; 8th to obtain for him the famous mares which fed on human flesh, and belonged to the Thracian king Diomedes, who used to throw men and women alive into their manger.

9 In three years' time Hercules destroyed all the birds, and brought to Mycenæ both the bull and the mares, to whom he had given the body of their master, Diomedes, when he refused to part with the swift and fearful animals.

9th

The next labor was of a different kind. There lived in the country of Cappadocia, which is in Asia Minor, a nation of women, without any men among them. They were called the Amazons, and were famous for their skill in hunting, and for their fierceness and courage in war, conquering the neighboring nations far and wide.

Their queen at this time was Hippolyte; and Eurystheus bade Hercules bring him Queen Hippolyte's girdle.

Perhaps he thought that a strong man would be ashamed to put out his strength against a woman. If so, however, he reckoned wrongly. Hercules had to do his work, whether man or woman stood in the way; and he won the queen's girdle in fair fight, without harming the queen.

" I must send Hercules to the very end of the earth," thought poor Eurystheus, who grew more and more frightened by every new success of his cousin.

So he inquired diligently of every traveler who came to Mycenæ, and in time had the good luck to hear of a suitable monster named Geryon, who lived in a cave at Gades, now called Cadiz, on the coast of Spain, near indeed to what the Greeks then thought to be the end of the world.

Geryon, so the travelers reported, had three bodies and three heads, and kept large and valuable flocks and herds.

"That will be just the thing for Hercules," thought Eurystheus.

10 So he called from his brazen pot, "Go to Gades, and get me the cattle and sheep of Geryon."

Hercules set off for Spain by way of Egypt and that great desert of Libya, through which Perseus had passed on his adventure against the Gorgons.

It was an unfortunate way to take, for there reigned over Egypt at that time a king who had made a law that every foreigner entering the country should be sacrificed to Jupiter.

Hercules, knowing nothing of this law, was seized as soon as he landed, overpowered by numbers, bound in iron chains, and laid on the altar to be slain.

But scarcely had the sacrificing priest raised his knife, when Hercules burst the chains, and being no longer taken at disadvantage, made a sacrifice of the king and his ministers, thus freeing the land of Egypt from a foolish and cruel law.

Thence he passed into the great desert, and traveled on until one day he reached a pile of human skulls, nearly as big as a mountain. While wondering at the sight, a shadow fell over him, and a big voice said, "Yes, you may well look at that; I have nearly enough now."

It was a giant, nearly as high as the heap of skulls.

"And who are you?" asked Hercules; "and what are these?"

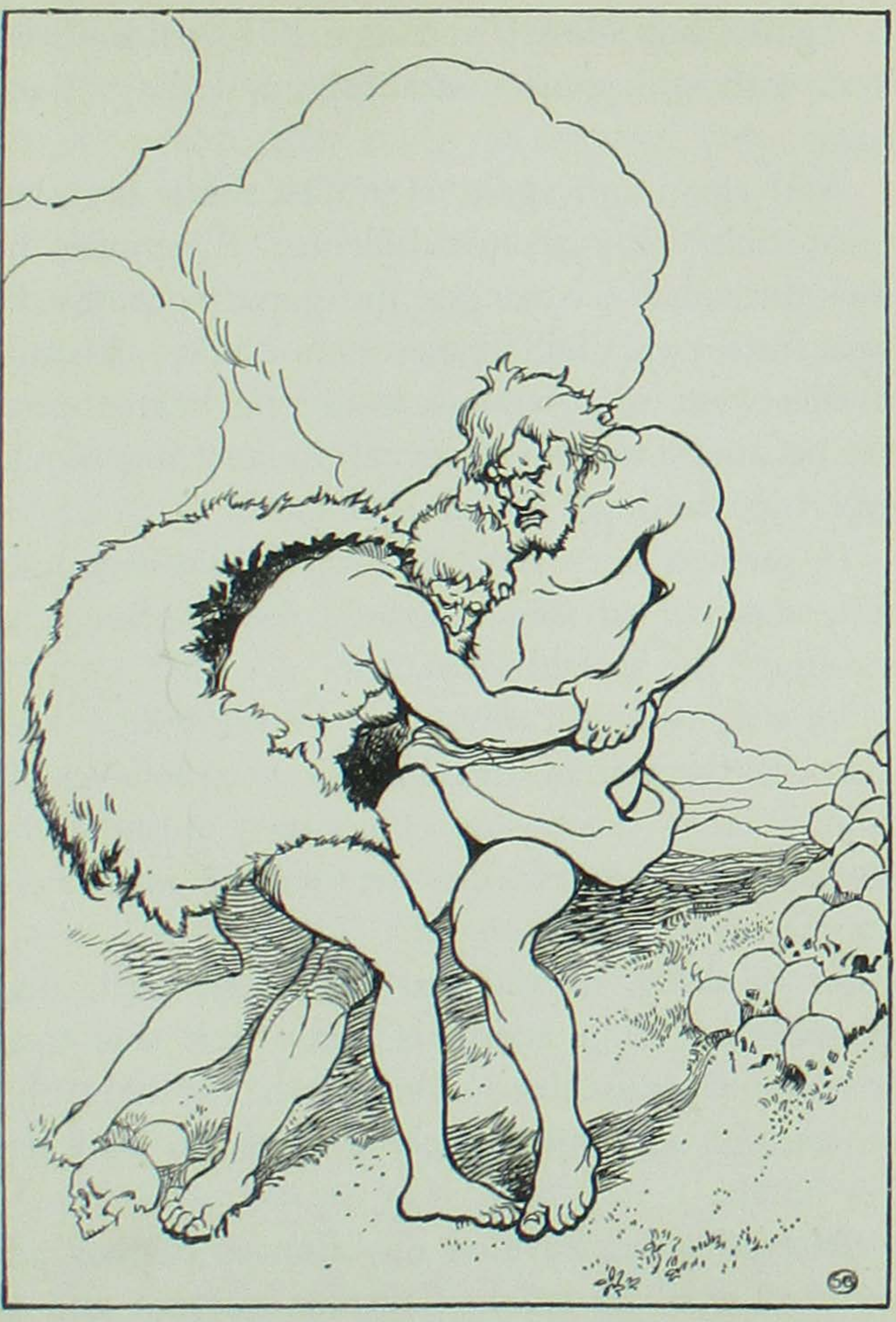
"I am Antæus," answered the giant; the Sea is my father and the Earth is my mother. I am collecting skulls to build a temple on my mother the Earth to my father the Sea."

"And how," asked Hercules, "have you managed to get so many?"

"By killing everybody I see, and adding his skull to the heap, just as I am now going to add yours."

So saying, he seized Hercules to make an end of him. And amazed enough the giant was when he himself was dashed to the ground with force enough to break any ordinary bones.

Antæus, however, though astonished, was not in the least hurt; so that it was the turn of Hercules to be surprised.



Again they closed, and again Hercules threw him, with still greater strength; and they closed again.

And again and again Hercules threw him, but every time with greater difficulty. The more he was thrown, the stronger the giant became; he rose from every fall fresher than before. Plainly, if this went on, Antæus would be beaten until he became stronger than Hercules, and would end by winning.

It seemed very strange that the more a man was dashed to the ground the fresher and stronger he should grow.

"I see," thought Hercules to himself. "This giant is the son of the Earth; so whenever he falls, it is on the bosom of his own mother, who strengthens and refreshes her son. I must take another way."

So thinking, he put out all his strength, and again lifted Antæus in his arms. But this time he did not dash him to the Earth; he held him in the air, and crushed him to death between his hands.

After this he traveled on, without further adventure, until he reached the far western end of the Mediterranean Sea, which was thought to be the end of the world. If you happen to look at the map, you will easily find the exact place: it is where the south of Spain very nearly touches Africa.

When Hercules arrived there, Spain quite touched Africa, and you might walk from one into the other. It is said that Hercules himself opened the narrow passage which lets the Mediterranean Sea out into the great ocean, so that ships could afterwards sail to Britain and all over the world.

That passage is now called the Strait of Gibraltar. But the rock of Gibraltar in Spain and the opposite rock in Africa, between which the strait lies, are still often called the Pillars of Hercules.

To get from there to Gades was no great distance; and to kill the monstrous ogre Geryon and seize his flocks and herds for Eurystheus was no great feat after what he had already done. But to drive such a number of sheep and cattle all the way from Gades in Spain to Mycenæ in Greece was not an easy matter.

There was only one way of doing so without being stopped somewhere by the sea, and this, as the map will show at once, is by crossing those two great mountain ranges, the Pyrenees and the Alps; and for one man to drive thousands of sheep and thousands of horned cattle over such mountains as those was the most tiresome and troublesome labor that Hercules had ever undergone.

He got as far as Italy without the loss of a single sheep or cow, and was thinking that he saw the end of his trouble.

One morning, however, having counted the cattle as usual, and having gone some miles on his day's journey, he became aware that there was something wrong. The sheep began to bleat and the cattle to bellow in an odd and excited way.

And frequently, from behind him, he heard an answering sound which at first he took for an echo.

But no, it could not be that, for an echo would have repeated the bleating as well as the bellowing, and what he heard behind him was the sound of bellowing only, precisely like that of Geryon's cows.

He counted the herd over again, and, though he was convinced that it was all right at starting, he found a full dozen missing.

Now a dozen was not much to lose out of

thousands. But he had been ordered to bring back the whole herd, and he would have felt that he had not done his duty if, by any neglect or laziness of his own, he lost even one lamb by the way.

So, following the distant sound, he drove his cattle with infinite labor back across the hills, league after league, till he reached a huge black cavern, the mouth of which was strewn and heaped with human bones.

His cattle became more excited and more restive, for the sound he was following evidently came from within the cave.

He was about to enter and search, when a three-headed ogre issued, whose three mouths, when he opened them to speak, breathed smoke and flames.

"This is my cave," he said, with all three mouths at once; "and no man shall enter it but I."

"I only want my cattle," said Hercules. "Bring them out to me."

"Cattle?" asked the ogre. "There are no cattle here. I swear it by the head of my mother."

"And who is she," asked Hercules, "that her head is an oath to swear by?"

"I am Cacus, the son of the Gorgon Medusa," answered the ogre, "and I swear — "

But before he could finish, a great bellowing came from within the cave, as if the very cattle seemed unable to endure such falsehood, and were proclaiming that he lied.

"I am sorry," said Hercules. "I am weary of traveling, and of monsters, and of giants, and of ogres, and of liars, and of thieves. I really do not want to kill any more. You are not one of my labors, and I have had enough trouble. Still, if you had as many heads as the Hydra (and I thought that I should never get through cutting her heads off), or as many arms as Briareus (and he had at least a hundred), I should have to fight you rather than lose one of the cattle I was bidden to bring."

Cacus laughed.

"Do you see those bones?" he asked. "They are all that is left of people who have looked for what they have lost in my cave."

"Then," said Hercules, "either you shall add mine to the heap, or I will add yours."

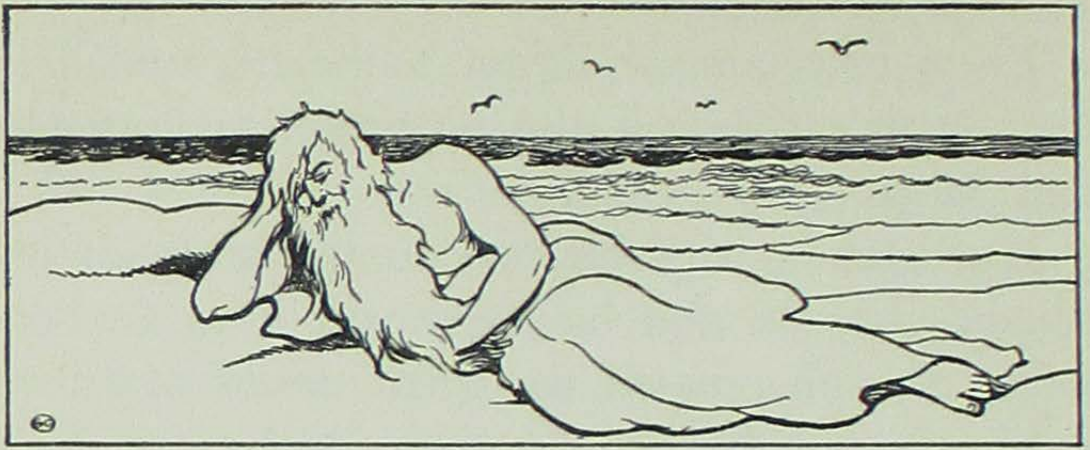
And presently the bones of Cacus the robber were added to the heap, and Hercules, having got his cattle back, at last reached Mycenæ.

Eurystheus almost forgot to be frightened in his joy at becoming the owner of such flocks and herds.

He listened with interest to the story of his cousin's travels, and having heard it to an end, said, "So you crossed the great desert of Libya until you reached the ocean which surrounds the world? Why, then, you must have found the way to the garden of the Hesperides, the garden of golden fruit which the great sleepless dragon guards, and which our forefather Perseus saw when he turned Atlas into stone. Did you also see that garden?"

"No," said Hercules.

"Then," said Eurystheus, "go and see it at once. Go and bring me some of the golden apples. Bring as many as you can."



CHAPTER XXXV

11th

THE GARDEN OF THE HESPERIDES

SO HERCULES, without being allowed any time for rest, had to go back the whole way he had come, without any certain knowledge of where the golden-fruited garden kept by the Hesperides was to be found, except that it was somewhere in the western part of Africa.

Somebody must know, however, or else the garden would never have been heard of, for travelers never told anything but the truth in those days. He therefore diligently asked everybody he met where the garden was, and, among others, some nymphs whom he met on the banks of the river Po, while he was passing through Italy.

"We cannot tell you; but we know who can: old Nereus, the sea god, if you can only get him to tell."

"And why should he refuse to tell?" asked Hercules.

"Because he never will tell anybody anything, unless he is obliged."

"And how is he to be obliged?" again asked Hercules.

"He is bound to answer anybody who is stronger than he."

"Well, I am pretty strong," said Hercules, modestly. "Anyhow, I can but try."

"Yes, you do look strong," said the nymphs; "but — "

Here they broke into a laugh, as if some sort of joke were in their minds.

"Well, if you go to the Ægean Sea, where King Ægeus was drowned, you'll be sure to find Nereus sleeping in the sun somewhere along the shore."

"And how shall I know him when I see him?" asked Hercules.

"You will see a very, very old man, older than anybody you ever saw, with bright blue hair, and a long white beard. He has fifty daughters, so he often gets tired, and likes to sleep as much as he can."

Hercules thanked the nymphs, whom he still heard laughing after he left them, and thought to himself that it would not be much trouble to prove himself stronger than an old man who was always tired.

So, having journeyed back again to the Ægean Sea, he walked along the shore till, sure enough, he saw, sound asleep in a sunny cove, a man who looked a thousand years old, with a white beard reaching below his waist, and with hair as blue as the sea.

"Will you kindly tell me the way to the garden of the Hesperides?" asked Hercules, waking Nereus by a gentle shake, though I suspect one of Hercules' shakes was not what most people would consider gentle.

Instead of answering, Nereus tried to roll himself into the sea, at the bottom of which was his home.

Hercules caught him by the leg and arm, when, to his amazement, Nereus suddenly turned into a vigorous young man, who wrestled with him stoutly to get away.

Hercules got him down at last.

"Now tell me the way to the garden of the Hesperides," he panted; for he was out of breath with the struggle.

But he found himself holding down, no longer a man, but a huge and slippery seal, which all but succeeded in plunging into the sea.

But he did not let go until the seal also was exhausted.

And then Hercules found out what had made the nymphs laugh so. For when the seal was wearied out, it changed into a gigantic crab, the crab into a crocodile, the crocodile into a mermaid, the mermaid into a sea serpent, the sea serpent into an albatross, the albatross into an octopus, the octopus into a mass of seaweed, which was the hardest to hold of all.

But the seaweed turned back into the old man again, who said, "There, you have conquered me in all my shapes; I have n't any more. You may let me go now, and I will answer you. You must go on through Italy and Spain, and thence across into Africa. You will then be in the land of Mauretania. You must still go south, following the seashore, till you come to the giant Atlas, who supports the sky on his head, and so keeps it from falling

He will tell you about the garden. It is close by — the garden of the Hesp— "

His voice had grown fainter and fainter, and so, having finished his answer, he turned over and went comfortably to sleep again.

Once more Hercules set out on the journey which had seemed as if it would never even begin.

Once more he traveled through Italy and Spain, and crossed into Africa over the Strait of Gibraltar, which he himself had made. And on and on he went, always southward by the sea, till, full six hundred miles from the Pillars of Hercules, he saw what he knew must be the giant Atlas on whose head rested the sky.

There Atlas, King of Mauretania, had stood ever since he looked on the head of Medusa. And if you wonder how the sky was held up before that time, you must ask Nereus, if you can catch him, not me.

As you may suppose, the poor giant was terribly weary of having to hold up, night and day, year after year, the whole weight of the sun, moon, and stars.

Even his strength was not able to keep stars from falling now and then. Sometimes on a clear night you may see them tumbling down by scores, so it is terrible to think of what would happen if he took even a moment's rest. The whole sky would come crashing down, and the universe would be in ruins.

He was longing for the rest he dared not take, and so, when Hercules said to him, "I am seeking fruit from the garden of the Hesperides," a crafty idea came into the giant's mind.

"Ah," said Atlas, with a nod which shook down a whole shower of stars. "There is no difficulty. All you have to do is walk through the sea toward the setting sun, till you get there. And there 's nothing to prevent you from getting the golden fruit but the dragon who guards the tree on which it grows. The sea does n't come up higher than to my waist, even in the deepest part; and, if you can get past the dragon, my three daughters, the Hesperides, will no doubt receive you with the greatest surprise."

For the first time Hercules felt dismayed. He had no boat, nor the means of building one; he could not swim farther than his eyes could see. As for wading through an ocean that would come up to the waist of a giant as high as the skies, that was absurd. And as to the dragon, he remembered that Perseus had only passed it by means of a helmet which made its wearer invisible.

Atlas saw his perplexity.

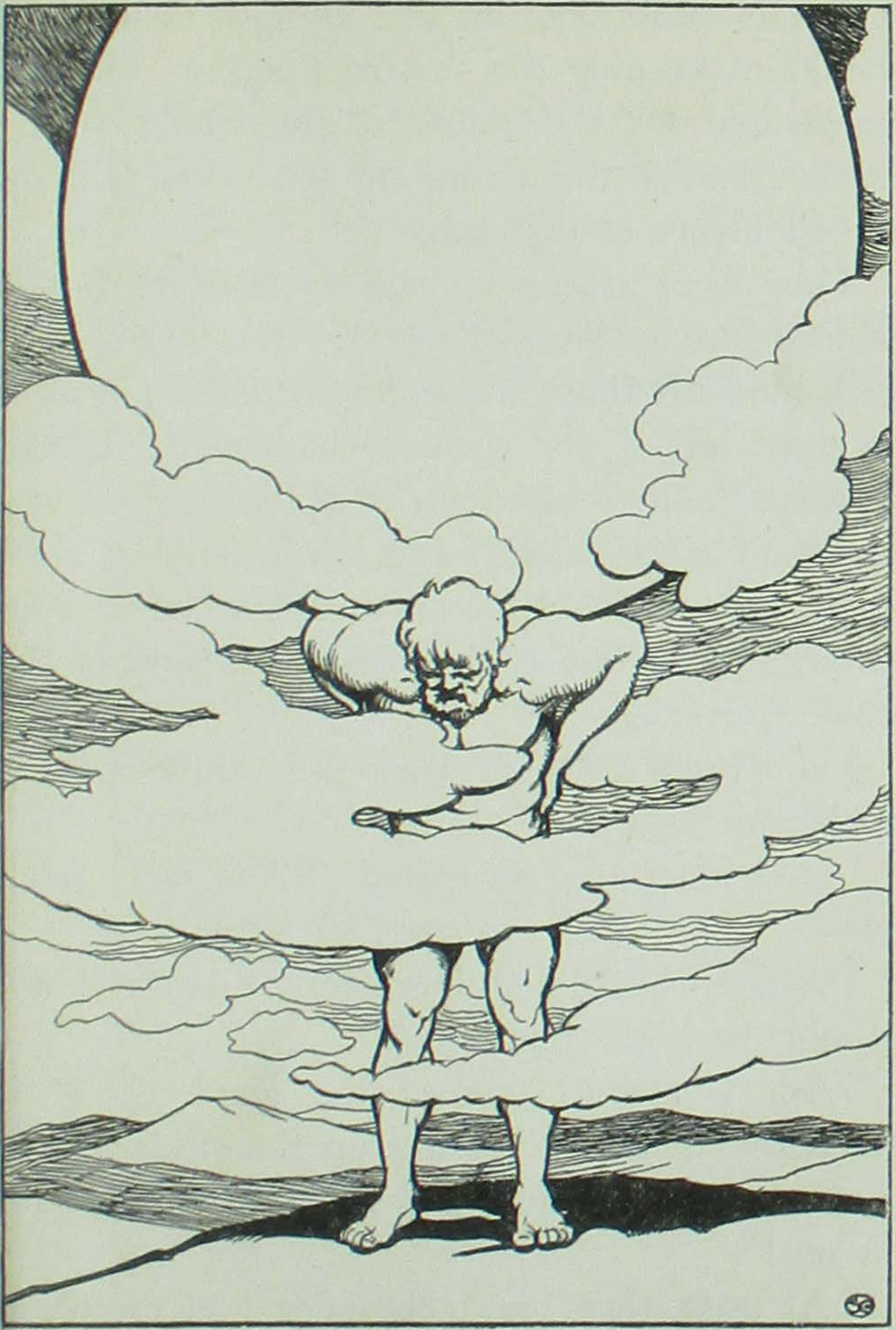
"Ah, I forgot you were such a little fellow," said the giant. "I 'll go and get you some of the fruit myself. It is n't many of my steps from here to the garden, and the dragon knows me; and if he did n't, I could step over him. And he could n't hurt me, seeing that I 've been turned to stone. But wait, though: what on earth 's to become of the sky while I 'm gone?"

"I 'm pretty strong," said Hercules. "If I climb up to the peak of the mountain next to you, I daresay I could hold the sky up while you 're away."

Atlas smiled to himself, for this was just what he had intended.

"Come up, then," he said. So Hercules clambered to the highest peak he could find, and Atlas, slowly bending, gradually and carefully let down the sky on the head and shoulders of the hero. Then, heaving a deep roar of relief, he strode into the sea.

It was surely the strangest plight in which a mortal ever found himself, standing on a



mountain peak, and, by the strength of his own shoulders, keeping the sky from falling. He was answerable for the safety of the whole world: the burden of the entire universe was laid on the shoulders of one man.

They were strong enough to bear it; but it seemed like an eternity before Atlas returned.

A hundred times a minute Hercules felt as if he must let all go, whatever happened; indeed, he was actually tempted to yield, for he was weary of these endless labors; and it was only for mankind's sake, and not for his own, that he held on through the agony of the crushing weight of the whole universe.

But Atlas came at last, with three golden apples in his hand.

"Here they are," he roared. "And now, good-by."

"What!" exclaimed Hercules. "Are you not coming back to your duty?"

"Am I a fool?" asked the giant. "Not I. Keep the honor of holding up the sky yourself, since you are so strong and willing. Never again for me!"

"At least, then," said Hercules, "let me place my lion's skin between my shoulders and the sky, so that the weight may be less painful to bear."

Atlas could take no objection to that, so he put his own shoulders under the dome of heaven to let Hercules make himself as comfortable as the situation allowed.

Hercules saw his chance, and let the whole weight of the sky fall on the shoulders of Atlas once more.

And there it still rests; and thus Atlas failed in trying to shift his own proper burden to another's shoulders.

"Only *three* apples!" exclaimed Eurystheus, when Hercules returned. "You can't have taken much trouble, to get so little. Go to Hades, and bring me Cerberus, the three-headed dog of Pluto," he added.

"He will never do that," Eurystheus thought to himself. "To reach Hades, he must die."

CHAPTER XXXVI

12th labor

THE DESCENT INTO HADES

I DARESAY you have forgotten, for it is a long way back, the name of Admetus, that king in Thessaly, whom Apollo, when banished from heaven, served as a shepherd for nine years. Admetus did not know that it was a god whom he had to keep his sheep; but he was so good and kind a master that Apollo, revealing himself at the end of his exile, bade him ask what boon he most desired.

Admetus answered, "Grant that I may never die."

But that is the one thing which not even the gods can grant to mortal men. The very cause of Apollo's having been banished to earth was his killing the Cyclops for forging the thunderbolt with which Jupiter had killed Æsculapius for making dead men live again. Not even the Fates could change that law even for the sake of Apollo.

But they said, "Admetus shall live so long as he can find somebody else to die instead of him whenever his death time comes," which was all they could allow.

After the return of Apollo to heaven, Admetus lived on in great happiness and welfare.

He was one of the Argonauts; and he took part in the hunting of the great wild boar. He had fallen in love with Alcestis, the beautiful daughter of that King Pelias of whom you read in the story of " The Golden Fleece."

Now her hand had been promised to the man who should come for her in a chariot drawn by a wild boar and a lion. This Admetus did; and in this chariot he drove her back to his own kingdom, where he made her his queen. And there they lived in great love and happiness for many years.

But the day came at last which had been appointed to Admetus for his death time.

Then Admetus, remembering the promise of the Fates, and not able to bear losing the happiness of living, thus besought his old father:

"Father, you are already old and near to death; you have lived your life; it matters nothing to you whether your old age lasts a year less or a year more. What you now call life is only weariness and pain. But I am still young and strong, with the best part of my life still unlived, and my children ungrown, and my kingdom to govern: I beseech you to die for me, so that I also may live to be as old and as wise as you."

But his father answered, "No, my son; life is precious, even when you are old. The nearer we approach the cold dark grave, the dearer grow the sunshine and the living air. I will do anything else for you, but not die."

Then Admetus besought his mother: "Mother, you are old and weak, and a woman; I am young and strong, and a man. What is such life as yours compared with mine? I beseech you to die for me: let not a mother doom to death her own child."

But his mother answered, "No, my son; he who loves his life as you love it, and fears death as you fear it, is not one for whom even his mother ought to die."

Then Admetus besought all his friends and kinsmen; but all were deaf to him. For well the Fates had known that their promise would be in vain.

But at last his dear and beautiful wife Alcestis came to him, and said, "Admetus, I will die for you, and gladly."

Ah, those Fates did not know everything after all.

Admetus, with all his selfishness, had never thought of sacrificing his wife; and he was overcome with horror. He prayed that Apollo's gift might be taken back; but the Fates were not to be played with in that way, and they were angry perhaps at finding themselves baffled by a mere loving woman. So Alcestis had to die instead of Admetus, and she died proudly and gladly, just as she said she would.

Now that it was too late, her husband was broken-hearted at having caused his wife's death for the sake of what had been but a selfish whim. All he could do for her in return was to honor her love and devotion by a splendid funeral, to which people came from far and near to cover her grave with flowers.

Alcestis was buried, and the farewell hymn was being sung, when there thrust his way, rather roughly, through the crowded temple a stranger of mighty build, carrying a club, and clad with a lion's skin.

Admetus was too absorbed in his grief to notice this rude intrusion; but some of the bystanders cried shame on the stranger, and one of the priests came in his way, and said sternly, "Who are you that dare to trouble grief like ours?"

"Who am I? Why, the servant of King Eurystheus. Is this how you receive strangers in your land? I had heard that Admetus was the most generous of kings, and Alcestis the most gracious of queens; and here I find you all like ghosts at a funeral. Where is the king?"

"There stands the king," said the priest, solemnly.

And then he told the stranger the story which many a poet has told since, the story of how strong true love is, and how foolish it is to measure life by the number of its years.

Hercules, for the stranger was he, was angered in a moment.

"It is a shame," he exclaimed, bringing down his club on the floor. "Fates or no Fates, it shall not be. I am bound to Hades on an errand for my own king, and I will not come back unless I do a better one for yours."

So, leaving them all offended at what they took for an idle boast, he dropped into the open grave, the people only thinking that he had passed from the temple somewhat suddenly. Hence he followed the passage taken by the queen's soul till he reached the river Styx; and hard work must poor old Charon have had to row across such a weight as Hercules instead of the ghosts to which he was accustomed.

On he went, finding his way as best he could without a guide, until he came to the gate of Hades, where growled in the middle of his path the three-headed dog Cerberus, with flashing eyes and flaming jaws.

Orpheus, you remember, had quieted Cerberus with the music of his lute: Hercules, going to work in other fashion, brought down his club on one of the dog's skulls in a way that bewildered the other two. Then, seizing the monster by the throat, and in spite of its furious struggles, he fairly dragged it along with him by sheer strength, even into the presence of Pluto and Proserpine.

Standing before them, he cried, "God and goddess though you are, I will brain this dog of yours on the steps of your throne unless you surrender to me the soul of Alcestis, that I may deliver her from death, and lead her back into life again."

It was an unheard-of thing that a man should thus take Hades by storm, and dictate terms to its king and queen.

But for that moment I verily believe that Hercules became more than man, nay, more even than Alcestis, because, while she had died for the love of one who was dear to her, he had dared the torments of the lower world out of pity for strangers and hate of wrong.

Nay, I think it was truly this which had made his grip so fast on the dog's throat, and his club so heavy on the dog's three skulls; and this that made a mortal stand as master before even Pluto and Proserpine.

"In the name of all the gods," said Pluto, "take the woman, and begone!"

Then Alcestis appeared, a mere gray shade, the touch of whose hand was but like a film of gossamer. But as he dragged the less and less struggling Cerberus with one hand, and led her with the other, her shade took color and form, and her fingers tightened on his, until the living Alcestis, more beautiful than before, stepped with him out of her still open grave, and threw herself into her husband's arms.

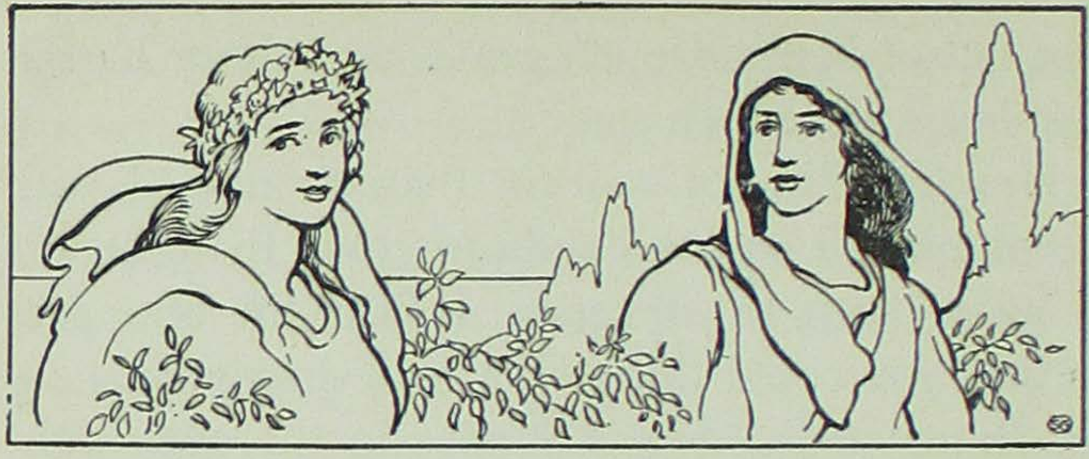
Hercules did not wait for thanks; indeed, with Cerberus still on his hands, his only thought was to hurry back to Mycenæ. It was the strangest picture you could think of, a man dragging along the three-headed dog of Hades in the open light of day.

It was one long strain on his whole strength, all day and all night long, for many nights and days. But he reached Mycenæ at last, and into his brazen pot leaped Eurystheus in the twinkling of an eye.

"Well, I have brought him to you," said Hercules. "Cerberus is yours."

"Then," cried Eurystheus, as well as his terror would let him, "be off with you, Cerberus and all. Never more be servant of mine; never let me see your face or hear of you again."

Thus Hercules, by obedient service, won his freedom, and his great penance was fulfilled. And the first use he made of freedom was to give it to Cerberus, who straightway, with a terrible howl, plunged into the earth, and disappeared.



CHAPTER XXXVII

THE CHOICE OF HERCULES

YES, Hercules was free at last, after twelve long years of slavery, during which he had scarce known a day's pleasure or ease. It seemed too good to be true. His only trouble now was what to do with his liberty. He was his own master; the whole world was before him, and he was strong enough to do whatever he pleased.

And while he was thus thinking what he should do with his life and strength, there came to him in the middle of the night a vision as of two women, real and yet unreal, bringing with them a strange light of their own.

They were the same women that Xenophon, the Greek historian, wrote about more than two thousand years ago, and that Lowell makes us see again, in that poem full of deep meaning, called "The Parting of the Ways."

The first to speak was young and beautiful, crowned with flowers, and with a voice as sweet as her smile.

"What folly is thinking!" she said. "You have toiled enough; you have won the right to do whatever you like best for the rest of your days. No more labor to serve another's will or whim; no more hateful tasks, one ending only for another to begin; no more cold, hunger, thirst, strife with monsters, and self-denial; and all for what? Why, for nothing. My name is Pleasure. Choose me for your soul, and you shall have power, glory, riches, comfort, delight, your whole heart's desire."

The other shape wore no flowers: her lips did not smile, and the light of her clear bright eyes was cold; and her voice belonged to her eyes.

"Yet think," she said, "before you choose, because you must choose to-night once for all. Was it Pleasure who helped you to rid the people of the ravage of the Nemean lion? No, indeed: she would have bidden you stay at home. Was it Pleasure who stood by you as you struck off the heads of the Hydra, one by one? No, indeed. Did Pleasure join with you in chasing the terrible wild boar and the stag with the golden horns? Did she clean out the Augean stables? Did she send you forth to free the world of the man-eating birds of Lake Stymphalus, and the dreadful Cretan bull, and the mares of King Diomedes, and the giant Antæus, and the ogre Geryon, and Cacus the robber? Did Pleasure save Alcestis from death, and break through the very gates of Hades? No; it was Obedience. And if obedience to a mere earthly master has worked such wonders for the good of all mankind, how much more good will come of your obedience to me?"

"And what, then, is your name?" asked Hercules, looking from one to the other, from the warm glowing smile of Pleasure to the grave eyes of the form which had last spoken.

"Among men I am called Duty."

Hercules could not help sighing, for the more he looked at Pleasure the more beautiful she grew; while the face of Duty seemed every moment to become more stern and cold.

"It does seem hard," he said finally, "to use my freedom in only making a change of service.

But after all, what is the good of having more strength than other men, except to help them? It's true, though I never thought of it before. And if Pleasure won't help me to rid the world of the rest of its monsters, and Duty will, why, there's only one thing for a man to do, and that's to choose Duty, and obey her, however hard she may be."

Then he went to sleep with his mind made up, and when he woke in the morning his choice woke with him.

So Hercules, instead of being the servant of Eurystheus, became, of his own free will, the servant of all mankind. He made it his work to seek out wrong, and never to rest until he had set it right: he traveled about the world, carrying everywhere with him the love of law and justice, and the worship of the gods, even into savage lands where such things had never been known. Ogres and monsters disappeared: it seemed as if his strength were bringing back the golden age, that age when all the world was happy.

One day his wanderings brought him into the heart of the great mountain range called Caucasus, a vast and dreadful region of snow-covered peaks which no human foot had ever climbed.

Never had he known a harder labor than to make his way among these icy precipices, where every step meant danger. Not a sign of life was to be seen or heard, when suddenly there arose a terrible cry like that of a giant in pain.

He looked round, but saw nothing except the silent mountains.

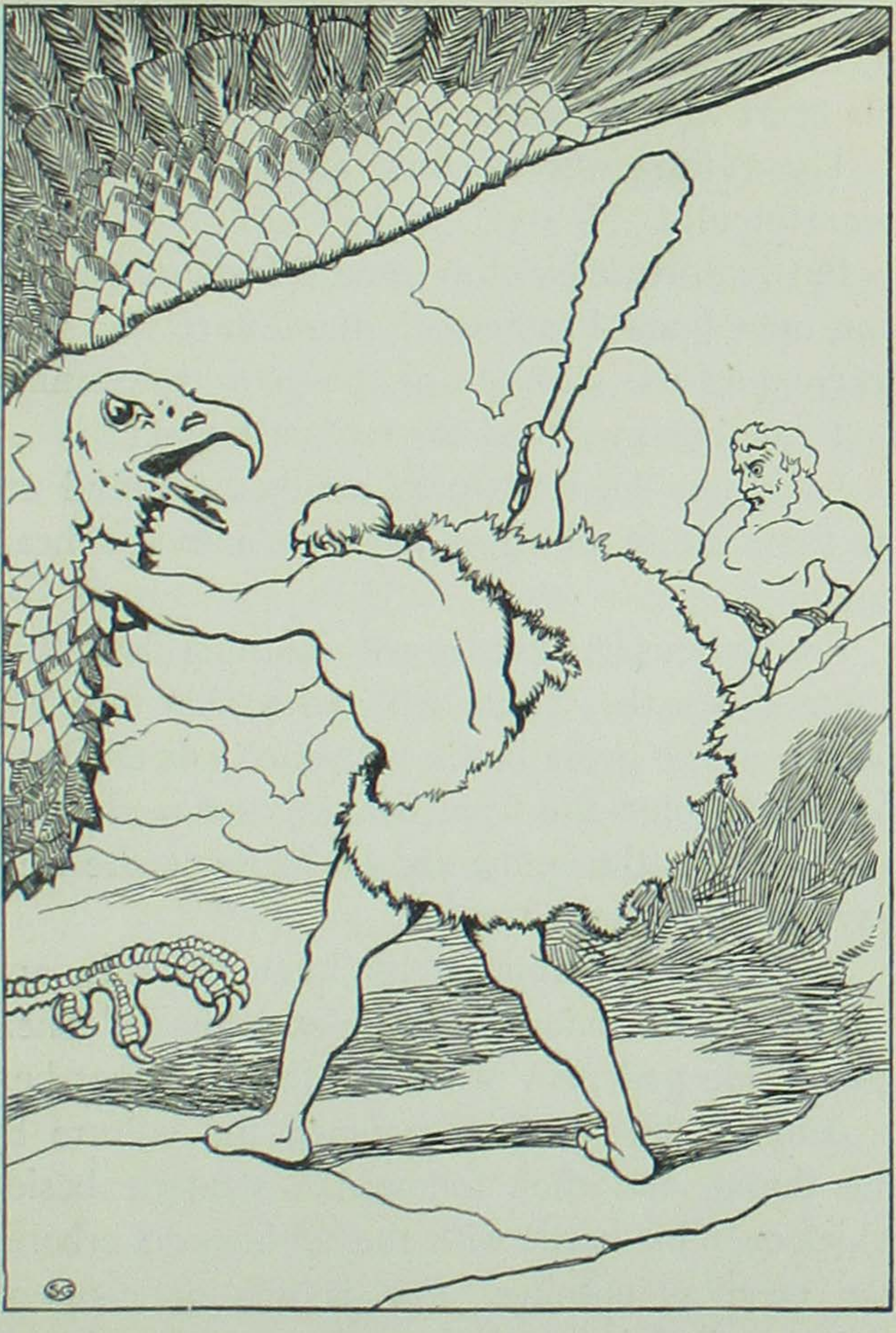
Then the cry came again, as if from far above him; and, lifting his eyes to the highest peak of all, he was sure that something moved there like the flapping of great wings.

What could it be? What could be happening on that high mountain peak?

He set himself to climb its sides, often so steep and icy that he was over and over again on the point of giving up in despair; but the higher he climbed, the louder and more full of agony became the cry.

At last, after many days of toil, he reached the peak whence the cry came, and there he forgot hunger, cold, and weariness in wonder at what he saw.

Bound to the rock by huge chains, so that he could not move a limb, lay what seemed a man, bigger than Hercules himself, with every muscle drawn and writhing in agony. And with good



reason, for a gigantic and horrible vulture had its talons fastened in him, and was fiercely tearing his heart with its beak.

The vulture was too busy at its cruel feast to see Hercules.

But its tortured victim cried, " Depart, whoever you are: I am Prometheus the Titan, who tried to conquer the strength of the gods by cunning, and am thus punished for my sin forever."

And then he sent forth another dreadful cry as the vulture plunged its beak into his heart again.

Prometheus! Yes; it was nothing less than Prometheus the Titan, who, when his race was beaten in the great battle with the gods of Olympus, had stolen fire from heaven, and made man, and who was thus punished for having made what gave the gods such trouble.

But Hercules, though he knew all this, and the story of Pandora besides, exclaimed, " Then, gods or no gods, sin or no sin, this shall not be."

And at the word he grasped the vulture by the throat, and then followed a struggle beside which even his battle with the hellhound Cerberus had been as nothing. For it was no common vulture of the mountains: it was the demon

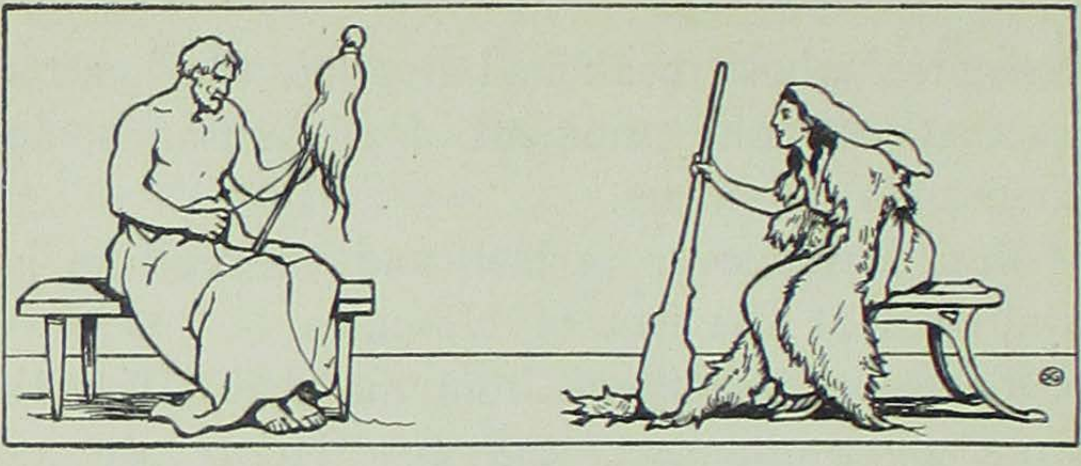
Remorse, whose beak had not left the heart of Prometheus one moment for thousands and thousands of years.

But it was over at last, and the vulture lay strangled at the feet of Hercules.

To free Prometheus from his chains was the work of a moment, and the Titan rose and stretched his free limbs with a heart at ease.

What passed between the Titan and the mortal is beyond my guessing, and I have never heard. I only know that a mere man had, by his strength and his courage, saved one who was greater and wiser than he from Remorse and Despair.

I have thought of this story till it means too much for me to say anything more. Only, if you have forgotten the story of "The First Man," I should be glad if you would read it again.



CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE TUNIC OF NESSUS

HERCULES, while passing through the land of Thessaly, fell deeply in love with a beautiful princess whom her father, a famous archer, had promised in marriage to the man who should fly an arrow farther than he.

This Hercules did with such ease that the king, angry at being surpassed, refused to perform his promise. Hercules went mad with rage and sorrow, and in a sudden fury slew a brother of the princess, who was his own friend and comrade; then, still more maddened by what he had done, he wandered away again to the shrine of Delphi to ask Apollo's oracle once more what he should do.

But this time the voice of Apollo was silent. It seemed to Hercules as if, in spite of all he had done for men, the gods had turned away their faces from him, and had become deaf to his prayers, even to his repentance; for he would have given his own life if that would have brought his friend back to earth again.

Were the gods angry because he had saved Prometheus from their vengeance? Or were the labors of a life to be lost for one moment of passion? If so, the gods were unjust, and Hercules, who abhorred injustice, broke forth against the gods themselves.

"I will no longer serve such wretches," he cried, "beings which bring man into the world only to torment him, and to make him a sport and a jest for them. I will tear down their temples and destroy their altars; I will side with the fallen Titans; I will sooner bear the punishment of Prometheus forever, with none to save me, than serve monsters of injustice, who allow man to sin and to suffer without help, and then cast him away."

But Apollo was just as deaf to his curses as to his prayers.

So Hercules put forth his whole strength against the temple, and no doubt would have left it a ruin, when, from the clear sky there burst such flames and thunders that the Titans themselves would have been dismayed.

And then spoke the oracle at last: "Is this the free service you vowed when you chose between Pleasure and Duty? It is the justice of the gods that you go back into slavery again until you have learned how to be free."

The thunder and the lightning ceased, and Hercules saw beside him a young man who looked like a traveling merchant; at least for such he took him, until the stranger for one moment stood revealed as the god Mercury, with winged heels and cap, and bearing the rod round which two serpents twined. It was only for a moment; the next, the god became the traveling merchant again.

"As we are to be fellow travelers," said Mercury, "I will tell you at once that I am under orders from the court of Olympus to take you to market and sell you for a slave. Do you submit? Or do you wish to learn from me the strength of Heaven?"

"I wish I could learn its justice," said Hercules. "But I suppose I am too stupid to understand. Everything is so dark and so strange. But what does it all matter, after all? I would as soon be a slave as anything else, now that I have lost her I loved and killed my friend."

"That is not the right mood," said Mercury. "It is better to rebel, as you did a minute ago, than to think that nothing matters, as you do now. However, let us go."

Mercury was always the most delightful and amusing of companions; and he was good-natured also, and did his best to make the journey cheerful. But, though he was the god of eloquence, and of business besides, he could not persuade anybody to become the purchaser of Hercules either by auction or by private bargain.

Nobody wanted a slave who looked so certain to become his master's master. Besides, people had forgotten all his good deeds, and only remembered that he had been a dangerous madman.

But in time Mercury and Hercules came to a country in Asia Minor called Lydia, which was then ruled by a queen, named Omphale. When she saw Hercules, she was brave enough to buy him.

Of course Hercules expected that she would make him outdo what he had done for Eurystheus; and nothing would have pleased him better than to be sent on the most impossible errands, so that, in toil and danger, he might forget his murder of his friend and his love for the beautiful princess.

Instead, however, of treating Hercules like the most glorious hero of his time, and employing him on services of honor, Omphale amused herself by giving him a spindle and distaff, and setting him to spin among her women, while she robed herself in his lion's skin and tried to swing his club in her delicate hands.

And whenever he was clumsy with the distaff, which was very often, she would laugh at him, and strike him across the face with her slipper.

For three long years Hercules sat and spun among Omphale's handmaids; and then she, being tired of her amusement and of his submission, set him free, and gave him back his club and lion's skin.

They had been three wasted, unwholesome years, and his strength had wasted with them; moreover, his fame was being forgotten, and nothing seemed left for him to do. How long it seemed since he had fought the Hydra and borne on his shoulders the weight of the sky! It was as if he had become altogether another and a feebler man.

While waiting to see what should happen, he abode at the court of the king of Sparta, the stepfather of the great twin brethren, Castor and Pollux, and of their sister Helen, the most beautiful woman in the whole world, of whom you will hear more some day.

And it was while here that he heard of the fame of another beautiful princess, Deianira, whose hand was to be the prize of a great wrestling match.

Hercules, longing for some adventure to try his strength again, betook himself thither. Weakened though he was, he overthrew every one of his rivals with ease. Then, after his marriage with Deianira, he set out with her to visit another king, with whom he intended to remain awhile.

But when they reached a river which they had to cross on their way, the water was so swollen with heavy rains that Hercules did not know how to take his wife over.

As they stood wondering what they should do without boat or bridge, there cantered up a centaur, who saw the plight they were in, and said, " I am Nessus. If this fair lady will deign to seat herself on my back, I will swim over with her quickly; and then I will come back for you."

He spoke frankly and courteously; so Hercules, thinking no harm, lifted Deianira upon the back of the centaur, who plunged into the river, and soon reached the other side. But on landing, instead of performing his promise, he set off at a gallop; and it was soon clear enough that he meant to run away with Deianira, while Hercules stood helpless beyond the river.

He was almost out of sight when Hercules let fly an arrow, which had been dipped in the poison of the Hydra, with such force and so true an aim that it pierced the centaur without touching Deianira.

Nessus fell to the earth, and, feeling himself dying, said to her, " I die for love of you; but I forgive you freely. Take my tunic; for it is of magic power. If your husband's heart ever strays from you, bid him wear it, and his love will return to you and never wander again."

So saying, he groaned and died; and Deianira, having taken from him his blood-stained tunic, waited there till Hercules, having found a ford higher up the river, was able to rejoin her. And so at last they reached the king they were intending to visit, who received them with all kindness and honor.

Here they dwelt in great content; nor was there any cause why they should not have spent all their life to come in rest and peace, had not, by ill luck, a great war broken out between that king and another. Hercules gained the victory for his host; and there, among the prisoners of war, was the slain king's daughter, the very princess on whose account Hercules had killed her brother and his friend, and cursed the gods, and so become a slave.

Yet, when he saw her again, all thought of Deianira passed away from him, and his love for the princess was stronger even than at first; while he found that her love had remained true to him and unchanged. He could not part from her, and so he took her with him to a mountain, where he intended to offer sacrifice to Jupiter in honor of the great victory that he had won for the king.

The altar was prepared, and the sacrifice was ready, when there arrived a messenger, who knelt before him, and said, "Princess Deianira, your loving wife, has heard of this great sacrifice, and sends you by me this tunic, which she prays you to wear for her sake, that she may have some part in your thanksgiving."

But in truth it was of her husband's love for the princess that Deianira had heard; and therefore she had sent him the tunic of Nessus, which was to bring his heart back to her again.

Little she guessed the cunning revenge of the centaur, who knew that the arrow of Hercules, in piercing the tunic, had left on it a drop of the poison of the Hydra.

Hercules put on the gift of Deianira, and, accompanied by his friend Philoctetes, ascended the mountain to celebrate the sacrifice. But no sooner had he reached the altar than the poison began to work, eating through his skin into his flesh, even to his bones, so that his agony was too great to bear.

He tried to tear off the fatal tunic; but the more he tore at it, the more it clung. At last the agony began to gnaw his heart, and he despaired.

" Would," he cried, " that I had never been born! My strength has been my curse. I have labored to clear the world of evil; and pain and sin are still as strong as if the serpents I once strangled had succeeded in strangling me in my cradle. The Hydra is dead, but its poison goes on working; and open savage force is only changed into fraud and guile. Happier is Eurystheus, whom weakness and cowardice have kept from doing harm; wiser are they who choose peace and pleasure; who sit with folded hands, and let monsters and ogres devour whomsoever else they will. As for me, I have been a curse to those whom I have loved the best, and leave more evil in the world than I found. There is no use in strength, since it can be conquered by pain; nor in subduing others, when you cannot master your own self; nor in duty without knowledge; nor in life, which is only blunder and misery and toil and sin. The best thing is never to have been born; and the next best thing is to die."

So he gave his bow and arrows to Philoctetes, who swore to bury his ashes in the earth, and never to reveal where they were laid.

"For," said Hercules, "I wish to sleep and forget and be forgotten. I will not that men shall pay me even so much honor as a tomb."

Then he spread his lion's skin over the altar, and laid himself on it with his club for a pillow, and bade his friend set fire to it, so that he might die, not of poison and treachery, but like a man, and of his own free will, making himself the sacrifice he had vowed.

Philoctetes mournfully obeyed. And thus miserably perished Hercules, the greatest and last of the heroes; for after him there came no more. Thus died the strongest of men, in the belief that all effort is useless, and that he had lived in vain.

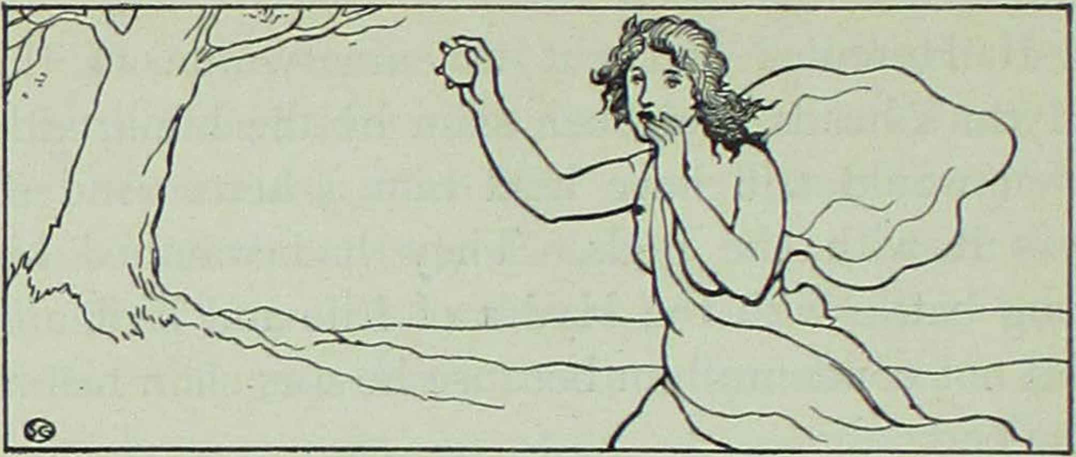
But the gods knew better; for not once had they been unjust, in spite of seeming. They knew both his strength and his weakness; they saw the whole man, often foolish and sinful and weak; often failing and falling, but willing what was right, and loving it even when he fell into wrong.

The gods judged him by his whole life, not by its wretched end, when he was maddened by passion and tortured by pain. They remembered how he had chosen between Pleasure and Duty; how he had striven with Hades for the life of Alcestis; how he had scaled Caucasus because he had heard a cry of pain; how, even when he cursed the gods at the great oracle of Delphi, it was because he thought them unjust, and because he loved justice and hated injustice with his whole soul and being. He might hold his own service cheap, but not they; for, with the gods, effort cannot fail: to fight is the same thing as to conquer.

If Hercules had cut off ninety-nine of the Hydra's heads, and been slain by the hundredth, men would still have held him a hero. And so was it with the gods. They had watched his long battle with the Hydra of Life and Evil, and did not condemn him because he was slain before the end.

And so, in the fire of the altar on the mountain where he died, his pains, his sins, his weaknesses, were purged away. And even as he was the only mortal who ever conquered the abode of the dead, so was he the only one who ever received such reward. Instead of being sent among the happy spirits of the Elysian fields, in the underworld, he was received into the glory of Olympus, among the gods themselves, there, with strength made pure and perfect, to serve and help mankind forever.

For does not Ruskin say, in "The Queen of the Air," "Hercules was no dead hero, to be remembered only as a victor over monsters of the past — harmless now, as slain. He was the perpetual type and mirror of heroism, and its present and living aid against every ravenous form of human trial and pain"?



CHAPTER XXXIX

THE APPLE OF DISCORD

NEVER was such a wedding feast known as that of Peleus and Thetis. And no wonder; for Peleus was king of Thessaly, and Thetis was a goddess, the goddess who keeps the gates of the west, and throws them open for the chariot of the sun to pass through when its day's journey is done.

Not only all the neighboring kings and queens came to the feast, but the gods and goddesses besides, bringing splendid presents to the bride and bridegroom.

Only one goddess was not there, because she had not been invited; and she had not been invited for the best of all reasons. Her name was Ate, which means that she was the goddess of mischief and strife; and wherever she went she caused quarreling and confusion.

Jupiter had turned her out of heaven for setting even the gods by the ears; and ever since then she had been wandering about the earth, making trouble, for they would not have her even in Hades.

"So they won't have me at their feast," she said to herself, when she heard the sound of the merriment to which she had not been bidden. "Very well; they shall be sorry. I see a way to make a bigger piece of mischief than ever was known."

So she took a golden apple, wrote some words on it, and, keeping herself out of sight, threw it into the middle of the feasters, just when they were most merry.

Nobody saw where the apple came from; but of course they supposed it had been thrown among them for frolic; and one of the guests, taking it up, read aloud the words written on it. The words were, "For the most beautiful."

"What a handsome present somebody has sent me!" said Juno, holding out her hand for the apple.

"Sent *you*?" asked Diana. "What an odd mistake, to be sure! Don't you see it is for the most beautiful? I will thank you to hand me what is so clearly intended for *me*."

"You seem to forget *I* am present," said Vesta, making a snatch at the apple.

"Not at all," answered Ceres; "only *I* happen to be here too. And who doubts that where I am, there is the most beautiful?"

"Except where *I* am," added Proserpine.

"What folly is all this!" exclaimed Minerva, the wise. "Wisdom is the only true beauty; and everybody knows that I am the wisest of all."

"But it's for the *most* beautiful," declared Venus. "The idea of its being for anybody but *me*!"

Then every nymph and goddess present, and even every woman, put in her claim, until from claiming and disputing it grew to arguing and wrangling and downright quarreling: insults flew about, until the merriment grew into an angry din, the like of which had never been heard.

But when it became clear that it was impossible for everybody to be the most beautiful, the claimants gradually settled down into three parties, some taking the side of Venus, others of Juno, others of Minerva.

"We shall never settle it among ourselves," said one, when all were fairly out of breath with quarreling. "Let the gods decide."

For the gods had been silent all the while; and now they looked at one another in dismay at such an appeal. Jupiter, in his heart, thought Venus the most beautiful; but how could he dare decide against either Juno or his daughter Minerva?

Neptune hated Minerva on account of their old quarrel; but it was awkward to choose between his daughter Venus and his sister Juno, of whose temper he, as well as Jupiter, stood in awe.

Mars, the great god of war, was ready enough to vote for Venus; but then he was afraid of a scandal.

And so with all the gods: not one was bold enough to decide on such a terrible question as the beauty of three rival goddesses who were ready to tear out each other's eyes. For Juno was looking like a thundercloud, and Minerva like lightning, and Venus like a smiling but treacherous sea.

"I have it," said Jupiter at last. "Men are better judges of beauty than the gods are, who never see anything but its perfection. King Priam of Troy has a son named Paris, whose judgment as a critic I would take even before my own. I propose that you, Juno, and you, Minerva, and you, Venus, shall go together before Paris and submit yourselves to his decision, whatever it may be."

And so it was settled; for each of the three goddesses was equally sure that, whoever the judge might be, the golden apple was safe to be hers. The quarrel came to an end, and the feast ended pleasantly; but Ate, who had been watching and listening, laughed in her sleeve.

Troy, where King Priam, a friend of Hercules, reigned, was a great and ancient city on the shore of Asia Minor: it was a sacred city, whose walls had been built by Neptune, and it possessed the Palladium, the statue of Minerva, which kept it from all harm.

Now Priam and his wife, Hecuba, had many sons and daughters, all brave princes and beautiful princesses; and of his sons, while the bravest and noblest was his first-born, Hector, the handsomest and most amiable was Paris, whom Jupiter had appointed to be the judge of beauty.

Paris, unlike his brothers, cared nothing for affairs of state, but lived as a shepherd on Mount Ida, at some distance from Troy, with his wife, a nymph of that mountain, in perfect happiness and peace, loved and honored by the whole country round, which had given him the name of 'Alexander,' which means 'helper.'

You would think that if anybody was safe from the mischief of Ate, it was he.

But one day, while he was watching his flocks and thinking of his lovely wife, there came to him what he took for three beautiful women, the most beautiful he had ever seen. Yet something told him they were more than mere women, or even than mountain nymphs, before the tallest said, "There is debate in Olympus which is the most beautiful of us three, and Jupiter has appointed you to be the judge between us. I am Juno, the queen of gods and men, and if you decide for me, I will make you king of the whole world."

"And I," said the second, "am Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, and you shall know everything in the whole universe if you decide for me."

"But I," said the third, "am Venus, who can give neither wisdom nor power; but if you decide for me, I will give you the love of the most beautiful woman that ever was or ever will be born."

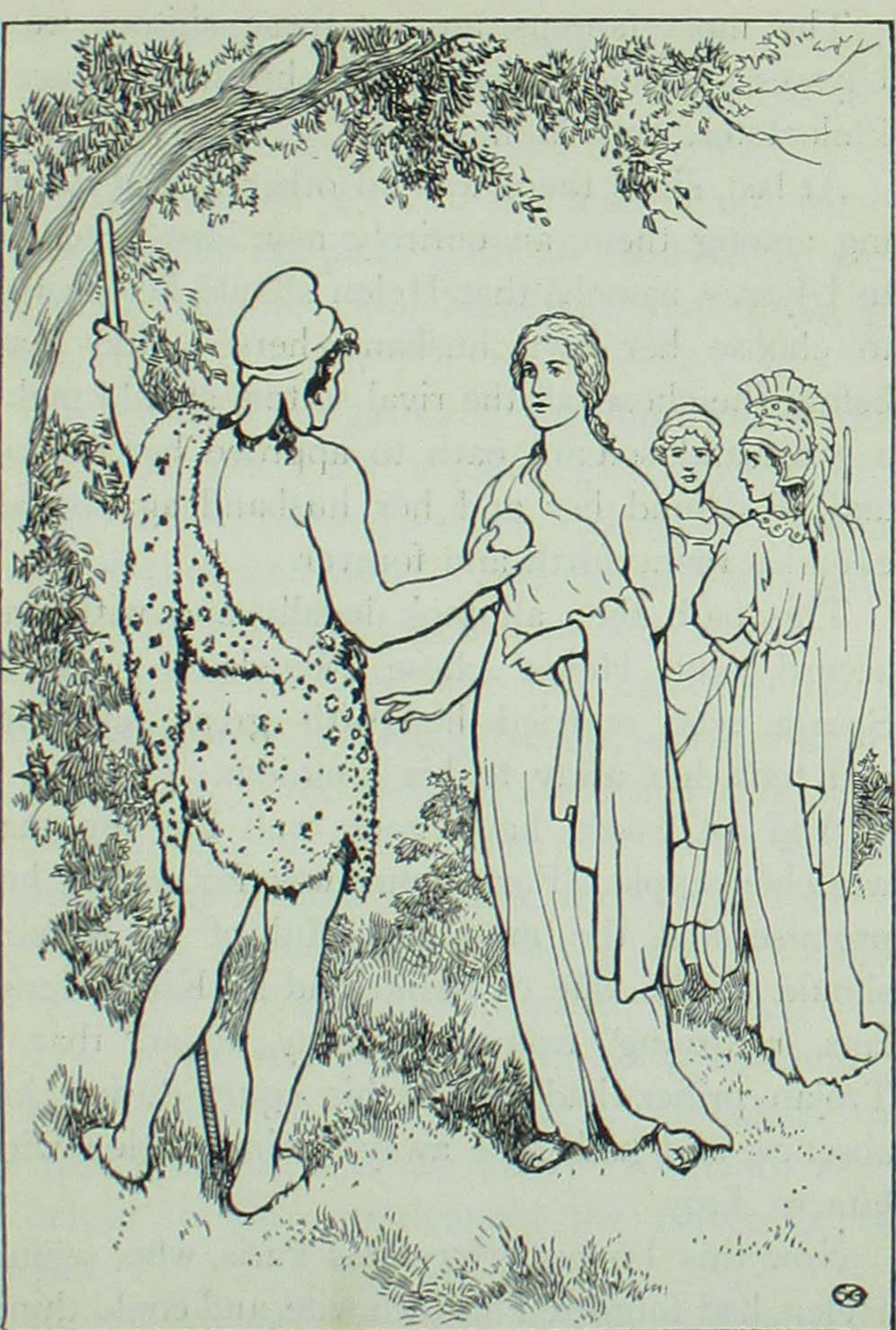
Paris looked from one to the other, wondering to which he should award the golden apple, the prize of beauty. He did not care for power: he would be quite content to rule his sheep, and even that was not always easy. Nor did he care for wisdom or knowledge: he had enough for all his needs. Nor ought he to have desired any other love than his wife's.

But then Venus was really the most beautiful of all the goddesses, the very goddess of beauty; no mortal could refuse anything she asked him, so great was her charm.

So he took the apple and placed it in the hands of Venus without a word, while Juno and Minerva departed in a state of wrath with Paris, Venus, and each other, which made Ate laugh to herself more than ever.

Now the most beautiful woman in the whole world was Helen, stepdaughter of King Tyndarus of Sparta, and sister of Castor and Pollux: neither before her nor after her has there been any to compare with her for beauty.

Thirty-one of the noblest princes in Greece came to her father's court at the same time to seek her in marriage, so that Tyndarus knew not what to do, seeing that, whomsoever he chose for his son-in-law, he should make thirty powerful enemies.



The most famous among these suitors were Ulysses, Diomed, Ajax, his brother Teucer, Philoctetes, and Menelaus.

At last, since there was no other way of deciding among them, an entirely new idea occurred to Ulysses, namely, that Helen should be allowed to choose her own husband herself, and that, before she chose, all the rival suitors should make a great and solemn oath to approve her choice, and to defend her and her husband against all enemies thenceforth and forever.

This oath they all took loyally and with one accord, and Helen chose Menelaus, King of Sparta, who married her with great rejoicing, and took her away to his kingdom.

And all would have gone well but for that wretched apple. For Venus was faithful to her promise that the most beautiful of all women should be the wife of Paris: and so King Menelaus, returning from a journey, found that a Trojan prince had visited his court during his absence, and had gone away, taking Helen with him to Troy.

Now this Trojan prince was Paris, who, seeing Helen, had forgotten his own wife, and could think of nothing but her whom Venus had given him.

Then, through all Greece and all the islands, went forth the summons of King Menelaus, reminding the thirty princes of their great oath: and each and all of them, and many more, came to the gathering place with all their ships and all their men, to help Menelaus and to bring back Helen.

Such a host as gathered together had never been seen since the world began; there were nearly twelve hundred ships and more than a hundred thousand men: it was the first time that all the Greeks joined together in one cause.

There, besides those who had come for their oath's sake, were old King Nestor, so old that he remembered Jason and the Golden Fleece, but even at ninety he was as ready for battle as the youngest there; and Achilles, the son of Peleus and Thetis, scarcely more than a boy, but fated to outdo the deeds of the bravest of them all.

The kings and princes elected Agamemnon, King of Mycenæ, and brother of Menelaus, to be their general in chief; and he forthwith sent a herald to Troy to demand the surrender of Helen.

But the great Priam was indignant that these chiefs of petty kingdoms should dare to threaten the sacred city of Troy: and he replied to the demand by a scornful challenge, and by sending out his summons also to his friends and allies.

And it was as well answered as that of King Menelaus had been. There came to his standard Rhesus, with a great army from Thrace, a country north of Greece; and Sarpedon, the greatest king in all Asia Minor; and Memnon, King of Æthiopia, with twenty thousand men. The hundred thousand Greeks were not so many as the army of Priam.

When Agamemnon gave the order to sail for Troy, Ate laughed aloud; for her apple had brought upon mankind the first great war.

. . . .

And now I seem to be waking from a dream which is fading away. The gods are becoming shadows. vanishing farther and farther away from man.

I could tell you, if I would, the story of how Troy was taken and burned after ten years of fighting, and how Priam and his sons were slain; of the wonderful adventures of Ulysses by sea and land before he returned home; of the deeds of Achilles and Hector; of how the few Trojans who escaped the slaughter followed Prince Æneas into Italy, where he made a kingdom, and was the forefather of Romulus, who built the city of Rome, which brings us from mythology, the stories of gods and heroes, into history, the stories of men.

All these things came from Ate's apple: yes, even the history of Rome, and of England, and of all the world.

You will read in the great poems of Homer the story of the siege of Troy and the wanderings of Ulysses; and in the Æneid of Vergil, to my mind the very greatest of all poems, the whole story of Æneas.

But my stories end where the great poets begin theirs. I seem, as I have said, to have been dreaming a long dream: and before I quite wake I see the gods growing fainter and fainter, year by year and century by century, while men and women believe in them less and less, until, when they are well-nigh forgotten, or thought of only as poets' fables, there comes, says Plutarch, in his book on why the oracles have ceased to give answers, a loud cry which makes the whole world sigh and tremble, "The great god Pan is dead."

Men heard all nature cry; and they knew it to mean that "the simple shepherd's awe-inspiring god," the very last of the gods, was no more: a new time had come for the world. And that same night a star rose into sight at Bethlehem, and stood over the manger where a young Child lay.

And yet, gone and lost though the gods be, you will be blind indeed if you never catch a glimpse of a dryad in the woods or of an oread on the hill; if you never think of Hercules when things seem against you and hard to understand; if you do not see in Perseus the true knight that a true man should strive to be.

What more shall I say before I lay down my pen?

Only that these stories are not nonsense, no, not one of them; that the more we think of them, the wiser we are; and that I love them so much, and think so much of what made me begin them, that I cannot believe that I have come to the end.

PRONOUNCING VOCABULARY OF NAMES

KEY TO PRONUNCIATION

ā as in fāce
ā̍ as in surfā̍ce
ă as in făct
ă as in *ă*ffect
ä as in fär
ȧ as in *ȧ*fire
ē as in bē
ē̍ as in bē̍gin
ĕ as in bĕg
ĕ as in basem*ĕ*nt
ẽ as in bakẽr
ī as in fīne
ĭ as in fĭn
ō as in bōne
ō̍ as in ō̍bey
ô as in bôrder
ŏ as in bŏnnet
ȏ as in lȏng
oi as in boiling
o͞o as in bo͞ot
ū as in mūse
ū̇ as in mū̇sician
û as in mûrky
ŭ as in mŭst
ŭ as in circ*ŭ*s
g as in get
ŋ like n in ink
th as in thin
y as in yet

Achilles	*ȧ* kĭl′ēz
Actæon	ăk tē′ŏn
Admetus	ăd mē′tŭs
Adonis	*ȧ* dō′nĭs
Ægean	ē̍ jē′*ă*n
Ægeus	ē′jūs
Æneas	ē̍ nē′ăs
Æneid	ē̍ nē′ĭd
Æolus	ē′ō̍ lŭs
Æsculapius	ĕs kū̇ lā′pĭ ŭs
(Asclepius)	(ăs klē′pĭ ŭs)
Æson	ē′sŏn
Æthiopia	ē thĭ ō′pĭ *ȧ*
Æthiopian	ē thĭ ō′pĭ *ă*n
Æthra	ē′thr*ȧ*
Ætna	ĕt′n*ȧ*
Africa	ăf′rĭ k*ȧ*
African	ăf′rĭ k*ă*n
Agamemnon	ăg *ȧ* mĕm′nŏn
Ajax	ā′jăks
Alcestis	ăl sĕs′tĭs
Alcmene	ălk mē′nē
Alexander	ăl ĕg zăn′dẽr
Alpheus	ăl fē′ŭs
Alps	ălps
Althæa	ăl thē′*ȧ*
Amasis	*ȧ* mā′sĭs
Amazon	ăm′*ȧ* zŏn
Amphion	ăm fī′ŏn
Amphitrite	ăm fĭ trī′tē
Amphitryon	ăm fĭt′rĭ ŏn
Andromeda	ăn drŏm′ē̍ d*ȧ*
Anemone	*ȧ* nĕm′ō̍ nē̍
Antæus	ăn tē′ŭs
Aphrodite	ăf rō̍ dī′tē
Apollo	*ȧ* pŏl′ō
Arcadia	är kā′dĭ *ȧ*
Argo	är′gō
Argolis	är′gō̍ lĭs
Argonaut	är′gō̍ nôt

Argos	är′gŏs
Ariadne	ăr ĭ ăd′nē
Asia Minor	ā′sh*ȧ* mī′nẽr
Atalanta	ăt *ȧ* lăn′t*ȧ*
Ate	ā′tē
Athamas	ăth′*ȧ* măs
Athena	*ȧ* thē′n*ȧ*
Athenæ	*ȧ* thē′nē
Athenian	*ȧ* thē′nĭ *ă*n
Athens	ăth′ĕnz
Atlantic	ăt lăn′tĭk
Atlas	ăt′lăs
Attica	ăt′ĭ k*ȧ*
Augean	ô jē′*ă*n
Augeas	ô′jė ăs
Aurora	ô rō′r*ȧ*
Autolycus	ô tŏl′ĭ kŭs
Bacchus	băk′ŭs
Bethlehem	bĕth′lė hĕm
Briareus	brī ā′rė ŭs
Britain	brĭt′’n
Cacus	kā′kŭs
Cadiz	kā′dĭz
Cadmus	kăd′mŭs
Cælum	sē′lŭm
Cælus	sē′lŭs
(Uranus)	(ū′r*ȧ* nŭs)
Calliope	k*ă* lī′ō̇ pē
Cappadocia	kăp *ȧ* dō′shĭ *ȧ*
Castalia	kăs tā′lĭ *ȧ*
Castor	kăs′tŏr
Caucasian	kô kā′sh*ă*n
Caucasus	kô′k*ȧ* sŭs
Caÿster	kā ĭs′tẽr
centaur	sĕn′tôr
Cepheus	sē′fūs
Cerberus	sûr′bẽr ŭs
Cercyon	sûr′sĭ ŏn
Ceres	sē′rēz
(Demeter)	(dė mē′tẽr)
Cerynea	sĕr ĭ nē′*ȧ*
Cerynean	sĕr ĭ nē′*ă*n
Charon	kā′rŏn
Charybdis	k*ȧ* rĭb′dĭs
Chios	kī′ŏs
Chiron	kī′rŏn
Clymene	klĭm′*ĕ* nē
Clytie	klĭsh′ĭ ē
Colchis	kŏl′kĭs
Corinth	kŏr′ĭnth
Cretan	krē′t*ă*n
Crete	krēt
Cretheus	krē′thūs
Creüsa	krė ū′s*ȧ*
Cupid (Eros)	kū′pĭd (ē′rŏs)
Cyclops	sī′klŏps
pl. Cyclopes	sī klō′pēz
Cynthia	sĭn′thĭ *ȧ*
Cynthius	sĭn′thĭ ŭs
Cynthus	sĭn′thŭs
Cyparissus	sĭp *ȧ* rĭs′ŭs
Cyprus	sī′prŭs
Dædalus	dĕd′*ȧ* lŭs
Danaë	dăn′ā̇ ē
Danaus	dăn′ā̇ ŭs
Daphne	dăf′nē
Deianira	dē y*ȧ* nī′r*ȧ*
Delos	dē′lŏs
Delphi	dĕl′fī
Deucalion	dū̇ kā′lĭ ŏn
Diana	dī ā′n*ȧ*, dī ăn′*ȧ*
(Artemis)	(är′tė mĭs)
Dictys	dĭk′tĭs

Diomed	dī′ō̍ mĕd
Diomedes	dī ō̍ mē′dēz
Dodona	dō̍ dō′n*ȧ*
dryad	drī′ăd
Echo	ĕk′ō
Egypt	ē′jĭpt
Egyptian	ē̍ jĭp′sh*ă*n
Elis	ē′lĭs
Elysian	ē̍ lĭzh′*ă*n
Elysium	ē̍ lĭzh′ĭ ŭm
England	ĭŋ′gl*ă*nd
Enna	ĕn′*ȧ*
Epimetheus	ĕp ĭ mē′thūs
Erymanthian	ĕr ĭ măn′thĭ *ă*n
Erymanthus	ĕr ĭ măn′thŭs
Europe	ū′r*ŭ*p
Eurydice	ū̍ rĭd′ĭ sē
Eurystheus	ū̍ rĭs′thūs
Euxine	ūk′sĭn
faun	fôn
Fury (Erinys)	fū′rĭ (ē̍ rĭn′ĭs)
Gades	gā′dēz
Ganymede	găn′ĭ mēd
George	jôrj
Geryon	jē′rĭ ŏn
Gibraltar	jĭ brōl′t*ȧ*r
Gorgon	gôr′gŏn
Grecian	grē′sh*ă*n
Greece	grēs
Greek	grēk
Guido	gwē′dō
Hades	hā′dēz
hamadryad	hăm′*ȧ* drī ăd
Harpy	här′pĭ
Hebe	hē′bē
Hebrus	hē′brŭs
Hecate	hĕk′*ȧ* tē
Hector	hĕk′tŏr
Hecuba	hĕk′ū̍ b*ȧ*
Helen	hĕl′ĕn
Helicon	hĕl′ĭ kŏn
heliotrope	hē′lĭ ō̍ trōp
Helle	hĕl′ē
Hellespont	hĕl′ĕs pŏnt
Hercules (Heracles)	hûr′kū̍ lēz (hĕr′*ȧ* klēz)
Hesperides	hĕs pĕr′ĭ dēz
Hippocrene	hĭp ō̍ krē′nē
Hippolyte	hĭ pŏl′ĭ tē
Homer	hō′mĕr
hyacinth	hī′*ȧ* sĭnth
Hyacinthus	hī *ȧ* sĭn′thŭs
Hydra	hī′dr*ȧ*
Icarus	ĭk′*ȧ* rŭs
Ida	ī′d*ȧ*
Ino	ī′nō
Iolaus	ī ō̍ lā′ŭs
Iphicles	ĭf′ĭ klēz
Iris	ī′rĭs
Israel	ĭz′rā̍ ĕl
Italy	ĭt′*ȧ* lĭ
Ixion	ĭk sī′ŏn
Jason	jā′sŏn
Juno (Hera)	jo͞o′nō (hē′r*ȧ*)
Jupiter (Zeus)	jo͞o′pĭ tĕr (zūs)
labyrinth	lăb′ĭ rĭnth
Latona (Leto)	l*ȧ* tō′n*ȧ* (lē′tō)
Leighton	lā′t*ŭ*n
Lemnos	lĕm′nŏs

Lerna	lûr′n*ȧ*
Lernæan	lĕr nē′*ă*n
Lethe	lē′thē
Libya	lĭb′ĭ *ȧ*
Luna	lū′n*ȧ*
Lowell	lō′ĕl
Lydia	lĭd′ĭ *ȧ*
Marathon	măr′*ȧ* thŏn
Marmora	mär′mō̍ r*ȧ*
Mars (Ares)	märz (ā′rēz)
Marsyas	mär′sĭ ăs
Mauretania	mô rē̍ tā′nĭ *ȧ*
Medea	mē̍ dē′*ȧ*
Mediterranean	mĕd ĭ t*ĕ* rā′nē̍ *ă*n
Medusa	mē̍ dū′s*ȧ*
Meleager	mĕl ē̍ ā′jĕr
Memnon	mĕm′nŏn
Menelaus	mĕn ē̍ lā′ŭs
Mercury	mûr′kū̍ rĭ
(Hermes)	(hûr′mēz)
Midas	mī′dăs
Minerva	mĭ nûr′v*ȧ*
(Athena)	(*ȧ* thē′n*ȧ*)
Minos	mī′nŏs
Minotaur	mĭn′ō̍ tôr
Morocco	mō̍ rŏk′ō
Mycenæ	mī sē′nē
naiad	nā′yăd
Narcissus	när sĭs′ŭs
Naxos	năk′sŏs
Nemea	nē′mē̍ ȧ
Nemean	nē̍ mē′*ă*n
Nemesis	nĕm′ē̍ sĭs
Nephele	nĕf′*ĕ* lē
Neptune	nĕp′tūn
(Poseidon)	(pō̍ sī′dŏn)
Nereus	nē′rūs
Nessus	nĕs′ŭs
Nestor	nĕs′tŏr
Niobe	nī′ō̍ bē
nymph	nĭmf
Oceanus	ō̍ sē′*ȧ* nŭs
Olympian	ō̍ lĭm′pĭ *ă*n
Olympus	ō̍ lĭm′pŭs
Omphale	ŏm′f*ȧ* lē
oread	ō′rē̍ ăd
Orion	ō̍ rī′ŏn
Orpheus	ôr′fūs
Ovid	ŏv′ĭd
Pactolus	păk tō′lŭs
Palladium	p*ă* lā′dĭ ŭm
Pan	păn
Pandora	păn dō′r*ȧ*
Paris	păr′ĭs
Parnassus	pär năs′ŭs
Pegasus	pĕg′*ȧ* sŭs
Peleus	pē′lūs
Pelias	pē′lĭ ăs
Pergus	pûr′gŭs
Perseus	pûr′sūs
Phaëthon	fā′ē̍ thŏn
Philoctetes	fĭl ŏk tē′tēz
Phineus	fī′nūs
Phœbe	fē′bē
Phœbus	fē′bŭs
Pholus	fō′lŭs
Phryxus	frĭk′sŭs
Pleiades	plē′y*ȧ* dēz
Plutarch	plo͞o′tärk
Pluto	plo͞o′tō
Pollux	pŏl′ŭks
Polycrates	pō̍ lĭk′r*ȧ* tēz

Polydectes	pŏl ĭ dĕk′tēz
Priam	prī′ăm
Procrustes	prō̍ krŭs′tēz
Prometheus	prō̍ mē′thūs
Proserpine (*Latin*, Proserpina; *Greek*, Persephone)	prŏs′ẽr pĭn (prō̍ sûr′pĭ nȧ; pẽr sĕf′ō̍ nē)
Proteus	prō′tūs
Psyche	sī′kē
Pyrenees	pĭr′ē̍ nēz
Pyrrha	pĭr′ȧ
Rhesus	rē′sŭs
Rome	rōm
Romulus	rŏm′u̇̍ lŭs
Sabra	sā′brȧ
Sahara	sȧ hä′rȧ
Samos	sā′mŏs
Sarpedon	sär pē′dŏn
Saturn (Cronus)	săt′ŭrn (krō′nŭs)
satyr	săt′ẽr
Sciron	sī′rŏn
Scylla	sĭl′ȧ
Sicily	sĭs′ĭ lĭ
Silenus	sī lē′nŭs
siren	sī′rĕn
Sisyphus	sĭs′ĭ fŭs
Spain	spān
Sparta	spär′tȧ
Stymphalus	stĭm fā′lŭs
Styx	stĭks
Tænarus	tĕn′ȧ rŭs
Tantalus	tăn′tȧ lŭs
Tartarus	tär′tȧ rŭs
Terra (Gæa)	tĕr′ȧ (jē′ȧ)
Teucer	tū′sẽr
Thebes	thēbz
Theseus	thē′sūs
Thessaly	thĕs′ȧ lĭ
Thetis	thē′tĭs
Thrace	thrās
Thracian	thrā′shăn
Titan	tī′tăn
Titaness	tī′tăn ĕs
Tithonus	tĭ thō′nŭs
Tityus	tĭt′ĭ ŭs
Triton	trī′tŏn
Trojan	trō′jăn
Troy	troi
Tyndareus	tĭn dā′rē̍ ŭs
Typhon	tī′fŏn
Ulysses (Odysseus)	u̇̍ lĭs′ēz (ō̍ dĭs′ūs)
Venus (Aphrodite)	vē′nŭs (ăf rō̍ dī′tē)
Vergil	vûr′jĭl
Vesta (Hestia)	vĕs′tȧ (hĕs′tĭ ȧ)
Vulcan (Hephæstus)	vŭl′kăn (hē̍ fĕs′tŭs)
Xenophon	zĕn′ō̍ fŏn
Zephyrus	zĕf′ĭ rŭs

nymphs

Dryads - forests
Hamadryads - trees
Naiads - water
Oreads - hills & mts
Fauns - same as satyrs only handsome
Satyrs - Half man - half beast